

METHODS AND PRACTICES OF EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP  
AMONG HINDU COMMUNITIES IN MALABAR

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BY

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To Rajendran Krishnasamy, for being a great mentor and a friend.

Thank you.

I have become all things to all people  
so that by all possible means I might save some.

- *1 Corinthians 9:22*

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## ABBREVIATIONS

BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
COWE	Consultation on World Evangelization
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
FGB	First Generation Believers
HBB	Hindu Background Believers
ICCS	International College of Cultural Studies
IMA	India Missions Association
LOP	Lausanne Occasional Papers
MBB	Muslim Background Believers
NLS	National Library Singapore
RSS	Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh
TTC	Trinity Theological College

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to critically examine approaches to the methods and practices of evangelism among Hindu communities in Malabar, Kerala, India. This paper will also examine the challenges the Church currently faces in reaching out to Hindu Background Believers (HBBs), and suggest means through which the Church can improve its efforts at evangelization, notably by taking greater note of the Hindu religious milieu and exercising greater cultural sensitivity in its methods of evangelizing Hindus in Malabar. More specifically, this paper will examine how the problem of differing social norms that have emerged between Hindus and Christians can be overcome, and will also undertake an examination of how certain tenets of Hinduism can be adopted as a way of accurately conveying the Gospel, while others will have to be revised or discarded for efforts at evangelism to be effective. This paper concludes with a set of recommendations designed to make evangelism to the Hindus of Malabar as effective and as accurate as possible.

To formulate these recommendations, the wider context of evangelism in Malabar is studied through a review of relevant literature, visits to the geographical location and interviews with those who are in active ministry in Malabar. To gain a more detailed response, the author also formulated a questionnaire that he utilized in gaining information from HBBs in Malabar. This study identifies the reasons for Hindus' resistance to the gospel and furthermore highlights the importance of discipling HBBs to become pivotal forces for change in the Hindu community.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

In this particular paper the writer has chosen to write about the people in Kerala, one of the twenty-eight different states in India. Kerala is a small state known as the land of "green magic". It is a narrow, fertile coastal strip bordered by the Western Ghats on the Southwest coast of India. Kerala is one of the states situated at the southern tip of India. In this particular paper, the writer is looking at a particular geographical area in north Kerala, known as Malabar.

The writer is from India and has been involved in training and evangelism among Hindus for a number of years. The first twenty years of life lived as a Hindu gives him a better understanding of Hindu culture and the understanding of Hindu background believers.

This study will be limited to the subject of evangelizing Malabar Hindus, those who are residing in the six districts of north Kerala – Kasargod, Kannur, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Wynad and Palghat. Geographical bounties will be limited to Malabar alone. It will review the present position of the Malabaris in north Kerala with regard to evangelism and discipleship, identify the realities and issues involved in evangelizing them, address these issues and suggest possible effective innovative methods and strategies to proclaim the gospel to this people.

Kerala, literally translated, means "land of coconuts". It has an area of 38,863 square kilometers. It is also one of the most highly populated states in India. The disproportion between its area and population is reflected in its density, which is 819



persons to a square kilometer. "Kerala represents only 1.18 per cent of the total area of India but 3.43% of the total population."<sup>1</sup>

The people in Kerala speak Malayalam and the literacy rate is very high; "In 1991, Kerala became the first fully literate state in India with literacy among adults: 89.9%."<sup>2</sup> There are seven universities in Kerala, a large number relative to other states. The overall literacy rate in Kerala is 94.8 per cent, the highest in India.

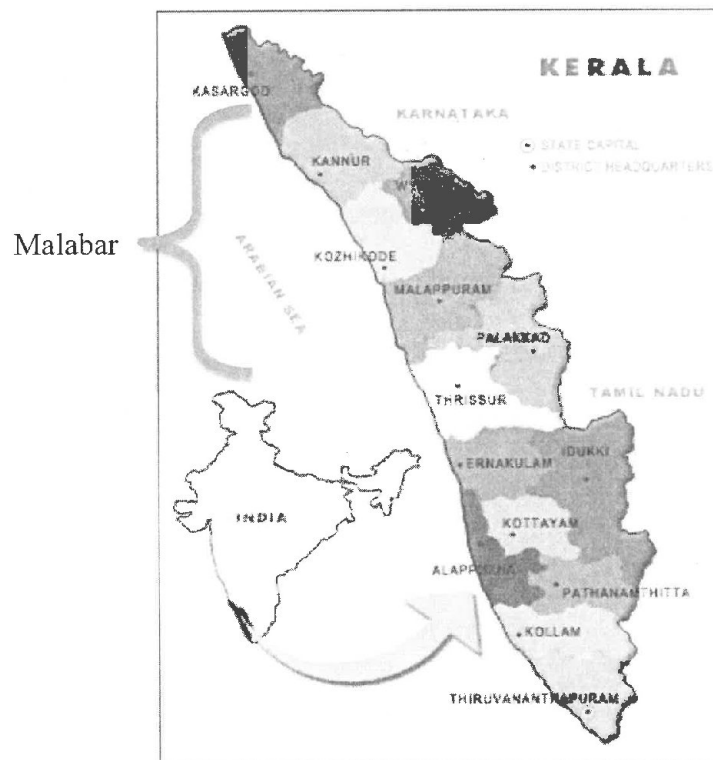


Figure 1. Kerala State

In 1957 Kerala became the first place in the world to democratically elect a communist government. Since then, the communist party has been elected as the ruling party from time to time. Despite being under Communist rule, Kerala enjoys more

<sup>1</sup> K.M.Mathew, ed., *Manorama Yearbook 2004* (Kottayam: Malayala Manorama, 2004), 659.

<sup>2</sup> Mammen Mathew, ed., *Manorama Yearbook 2011* (Kottayam: Malayala Manorama, 2010), 574.

political and religious freedom than many other Indian states. There is more freedom to preach the gospel here than in other parts of India.

People in Kerala mix along caste, religious and political lines. "Culturally Kerala is divided into three cultural zones, namely, Malabar, Cochin and Travancore."<sup>3</sup> In this particular paper the writer will be specifically examining the geographical area of Malabar, which is in North Kerala. North Kerala is known for her tendency toward political upheaval and is populated by mainly Hindus and Muslims. It is an area that is very resistant to the gospel. Most of the Kerala Christians reside in Travancore, which is in south Kerala.

Of note is that fact that occupational mobility as a result of social reforms movement, and leftist influence has resulted in the breaking down of the strict barriers of differentiated functions of individuals in the society.<sup>4</sup> For example, temple priests who were traditionally Brahmins,<sup>5</sup> were replaced in many places by people belonging to lower castes.

### **The Church in Kerala**

In Kerala, the beginnings of Christianity are traditionally traced to the arrival of the Apostle Thomas, purportedly in 53 A.D. Christianity's early introduction into Kerala gives it the status of being one of the ancient faiths of India. Tradition states that Christianity has been established in Kerala for a longer period than anywhere else in the

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<sup>3</sup> S.Vasantharaj Albert, *A Portrait of India III*. (Chennai: Church Growth Association of India, 1995), 34.

<sup>4</sup> Communist Party of India (CPI) and Communist (Marxist) Party (CPM).

<sup>5</sup> Brahmins are people who belong to the highest caste in the Hindu caste system. The term "Brahmins" is often mistaken for "Brahma" which is the creator god in the Hindu triune concept of god, and "Brahman" which is the ultimate reality in Hindu philosophy.

world and asserts that the Apostle Thomas landed on the Malabar<sup>6</sup> Coast in 53 A.D near Cranganore, where a church with carved Hindu-style columns supposedly dates back to the 4th century AD. The oldest church in India is also found in Kerala. "The Syrian Christians, with links to the Syrian Jacobite Church, are direct descendants of those evangelized by the Apostle Thomas. They form the majority of Kerala's Christians and are members of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant denominations."<sup>7</sup>

The total population of Kerala is 31,841,374. Of this number, the Christian population comprises 6,057,427.<sup>8</sup> This is 19 per cent of the total population. According to the 2001 census of India, this number includes the Roman Catholics and cults like the Jehovah's Witnesses.

"Over the past 40 years, the Christian percentage of the population has declined, largely through migration all over India and the world, but Kerala is still the state with the largest population of Christians."<sup>9</sup> There are an estimated 1.4 million people from Kerala residing in the Persian Gulf.

Christians are the third largest community in Kerala. The three major divisions among the Christians are as follows: the Orthodox Christians, Catholics, and Protestants. Each of these is further divided into sub-groups. Orthodox Christians, the oldest of the Christian groups, are divided into groups like the Jacobites (called the Yakobaya Sabha, the Kananaya Sabha and the Patriyarkis Sabha).

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<sup>6</sup> Northern part of Kerala.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*, rev. ed. (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2005), 327.

<sup>8</sup> Kerala People and Religion, "Kerala Religious Population," <http://www.prokerala.com/kerala/religions.htm> (accessed January 1, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Johnstone, *Operation World*, 327.

The major divisions within the Catholic community are the Roman Catholics, the Syrian Catholics, the Latin Catholics and the Malankara Syrian Catholics or the Zero Malabar Sabha. The Protestants consist of groups like the Pentecostals, the Church of South India, the Brethren and a number of independent denominations.

Protestants include mainline, Brethren and Pentestostal groups, as well as burgeoning numbers of fast growing Independent groups, usually from a charismatic background. There is a notable tension between traditional mainline groups and emerging groups; theology, style of worship, caste-related issues and style of evangelism are all areas of significant differences.<sup>10</sup>

### **Present Status of Kerala**

The common perception of Kerala is that it is a Christian state. This is decidedly untrue. There are more Muslims than Christians in Kerala. 24.7 % of the population is Muslim (7,863,842), while the majority of the population is comprised of Hindus, who account for 56.2 per cent of the total population (17,883,449), and only 19 percent of the population is Christian (6,057,427).<sup>11</sup>

There are 1985 Postal PIN Code<sup>12</sup> areas in Kerala. Each Postal Code areas contains an average population of 35,000 people. There are no Christian workers in 833 PIN Code areas. In 1152 PIN Code areas, where there are Christian workers, there is already a previously existing Christian presence.

When Ebenezer Sunder Raj talked about PIN Code areas, he said, "Based on our survey, we may conclude that three-fourths of all the Postal PIN Code areas in India do not have a single Protestant Christian worker. If we ignore this bare fact in our planning,

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<sup>10</sup> Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Colorado Springs: Biblica Publishing, 2010), 430.

<sup>11</sup> Mandryk, *Operation World*, 430.

<sup>12</sup> Also known as ZIP Code or PIN (Postal Identification Number).

we are deceiving ourselves."<sup>13</sup> This is the last known Pin Code survey that was carried out.

### Hindu Community

It is difficult to put Hindus in a single box and say that all fit into a particular definition. Hinduism is not an easy term to define, and many people have defined it in a broad spectrum of ways. Roger E. Hedlund puts it this way:

What is a Hindu? Definitions are difficult and unsatisfactory. "Hinduism", as it is known today, is a product of colonialism. This point deserves wide publication in the face of a rising militant religious fundamentalism. "Hinduism" is a recent term coined by European explorers and Catholic missionaries of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, popularized by Protestant missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and applied by orientologists to the complex of peoples, cultures, and local religions of India.<sup>14</sup>

C.V.Mathew defined Hinduism in a simpler way. "A Hindu is one who is born to Hindu parents and who does not elect another religious system. Also a Hindu is one who accepts Hindu views and ways of life at the rejection of the exclusive claims of other religious beliefs and practices."<sup>15</sup> This is true in the context of Kerala.

Kerala is not only a place where early Christianity can be traced, it is also a place where Hinduism has strong roots. It is the birthplace of Sankara<sup>16</sup> who lived in the eighth century. He influenced the world through his *advaita*<sup>17</sup> teachings.

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<sup>13</sup> *Go Into All Kerala: Present Status of Christian Work in PIN Code Areas* (Chennai: IMA, 1997), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Roger E. Hedlund wrote it in the preface of the book of C.V.Mathew, *The Saffron Mission: A Historical Analysis of Modern Hindu Missionary Ideologies and Practices*, C.V.Mathew, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2001), xi.

<sup>15</sup> C.V. Mathew, *The Saffron Mission: A Historical Analysis of Modern Hindu Missionary Ideologies and Practices* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2001), 13.

<sup>16</sup> Sankara consolidated the doctrine of *advaita vedanta*, a sub-school of *vedanta*. His teachings are based on the unity of the soul and Brahman, in which Brahman is viewed as a god without attributes. Also known as *nirgunabrahman*.

<sup>17</sup> *Advaita* literally means non-duality. It is a monistic system of thought.

There are many theological barriers to overcome in order to understand the Hindu community. Every Hindu defines his or her own worldview.<sup>18</sup> The author was born and brought up in a Hindu family. There were many Hindu worldviews in his family. His mother and grandmother were very much involved in popular *bhakti*<sup>19</sup> whereas his brother was a *guru*, leading others deeper into spiritual life. Knowing what a Hindu believes and his perceptions are essential for effective communication.

Over the course of this paper, the author will be using original research to examine the challenges the Church currently faces in reaching out to Hindu Background Believers (HBBs) and to suggest means through which the Church can improve its efforts at evangelization, notably by taking greater note of the Hindu cultural milieu, exercising greater cultural sensitivity in its methods of evangelizing Hindus.

### **Hindu Background Believers**

Although Hindus form the major religious group in Kerala, there are only a handful of Hindu background believers<sup>20</sup> in the church. Christianity has not succeeded in making headway among the Hindu intellectuals and the common people.

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<sup>18</sup> Paul G. Hiebert defines that the worldview as the "fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives." *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 15.

<sup>19</sup> Bhakti is a Sanskrit word for love or devotion to a personal god. It is a spiritual act of a devotee to his god.

<sup>20</sup> There are different terms used to describe people who find new faith in Christ. Some use the term, First Generation Christians (FGC). "MBBs" is a term used to describe "Muslim Background Believers." Most of the believers from Hindu background prefer using the term "Hindu Background Believers" to using converts or new believers. From here onwards author will refer to believers from Hindu background as "HBBs".

In mainline churches,<sup>21</sup> very few Christians come from Hindu background. Most of the HBBs are found in other protestant denominations<sup>22</sup> that are smaller and function as house groups. Hindus generally consider Christians to be from the lower castes.<sup>23</sup> Some charismatic churches and other groups are still trying to reach the Hindus, but traditional methods often result in the Hindus perceiving the Christian message wrongly.

### Convert or Disciple?

The term "convert" has a very negative connotation among Hindus. To them, a convert is a person who changes his or her religion for the sake of material benefits. Sometimes, he is also known as a "rice Christian". Such a term is loaded with negative connotations and historical baggage. As H. L. Richard puts it,

To the Indian, conversion means cultural and sociological and communal change. While to some in the Christian community it carries the positive connotations of regeneration, in the public sphere, conversion is perceived as snag or even a tear in the fabric of a somewhat delicate social order. Whatever term carries that sociological baggage you have to get rid of and adopt a different term with a focus on spiritual change.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> They are Church of South India (CSI), Mathoma Church and Syrian Jacobite Church.

<sup>22</sup> They are Brethren and Pentestostal groups, as well as a growing number of fast-growing independent groups.

<sup>23</sup> Caste is a form of class structure. There is a no clear cut understanding on how the caste system developed. The word "caste" is translated from the Sanskrit word *varna* which means color. Whoever developed the system must have based it on skin color. In Bhagavad Gita, Krishna said, "The four divisions of society (the wise, the soldier, the merchant, the laborer) were created by Me, according to the natural distribution of Qualities and instincts. I am the author of them, though I Myself do no action and I am changeless." Bhagavad Gita 4:13. *Bhagavad Gita: Annotated & Explained*, (Woodstock: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2002), 35.

These are the four main castes and their duties:

1. Brahmins: Priests
2. Kshatriyas: Nobles and warriors
3. Vaishias: Merchants and farmers
4. Shudras: Servants

<sup>24</sup> Mission Frontiers: The Bulletin of the U.S. Centre for World Mission, "Looking for a Way Forward," U.S. Centre for World Mission, <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/pdf/2000/04/200004.htm>, (accessed on June 3, 2009).

The term "convert" may be appreciated by Christians, but for a Hindu, it conveys a very different message. In the Kerala context, in relation to HBBs, it is a derogatory term associated with the West. "The term 'Christian' is sometimes avoided in order to dissociate from the 'Christian West' and the baggage it entails."<sup>25</sup>

Many Hindus would like to be followers of Jesus without changing their names and forsaking their loved ones. But the pivotal question that arises is this: Are Christians willing to accept these new believers into our community without prejudice?

### **HBB's Struggles**

HBBs go through many struggles in their Christian faith. Most of the issues are not properly addressed by the church. Below are some of the issues they face.

Casteism within the churches is a silent reality. Conversion to Christianity has not erased the caste system from Christians. "They (Syrian Christians) have high social status but have become little more than a caste within Hindu society, and few have broken out to become vital witnesses to those of other cultures. There are, therefore, few converts out of non-Christian backgrounds in the churches."<sup>26</sup>

When a HBB goes into the church, he or she is often treated as an outsider and is looked down upon. Such perceptions are often bound up with caste distinctions, with Christians having the misguided perception that they are from a higher caste.

The prospect of a divided Christian community does not attract Hindus to the church. Hindus are very communal people. Their temple is open every day and for everyone, and represents a communal space where people of all walks of life gather and interact in religious worship. When they look at the church, they cannot see the church

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<sup>25</sup> Mission Frontiers, June 3, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Johnstone, *Operation*. 327.



being a true communal living place. They cannot see any spiritual unity in the church even though the solidarity of the body of Christ is clearly taught and emphasized in Scripture.

It is not uncommon to find one denomination telling a Hindu convert that his conversion is not true because it does not take place in that particular denomination. Sometimes, the issue of concern is baptism. These issues are real in many HBBs' hearts.

As McGavran poignantly noted that "The great obstacles to conversion are social, not theological. Great turning of Muslims and Hindus can be expected as soon as ways are found for them to become Christians without renouncing their loved ones, which seems to them a betrayal."<sup>27</sup>

### Social Issues

One of the social factors that affect a Hindu's acceptance of the gospel is the fear of excommunication from the family. He also faces other social pressures, and these issues are even more critical when a convert is a female. They include:

- Fear of rejection from the community
- Fear of destroying the reputation of the family
- Fear of physical assault and persecution
- Fear of future (marriage, funeral, etc.)<sup>28</sup>

### Rejection from the Community

Many believers are forced to leave their home. But female converts cannot leave the home as it is not socially acceptable that they stay with someone else. In a shame-

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<sup>27</sup> Donald A McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eermans, 1990), 156.

<sup>28</sup> Fear of future is a real issue for many HBBs, especially when he or she will be excommunicated from the family.

based community, someone who accepts Christianity is considered as a blight on the community and a disgrace to the family. Rejection also comes with the consequence of being viewed by the community as a betrayer.

### **Reputation of the Family**

In Kerala, a family is known by their family name and the whole community knows his or her family name. The sharing of a common family name is the basis upon which a common collective identity is spread across individuals in society. When an individual becomes a Christian, he or she brings not only shame upon themselves but upon all the families who share this person's family name, tarring an entire sector of the community with disgrace and disrepute.

One of the worst things that can happen to a boy or teenager when he accepts Christ is the terrible effect it will have on his family. If he has a sister, nobody will be willing to marry her, and she will become a burden on the family. Traditionally, marriages are arranged by two families, as opposed to two individuals. If a family rejects the creation of blood ties with another because the other family has been tainted by Christian conversion, any plans for marriage will come to nothing.

### **Persecution**

Most new believers go through some form of persecution. Physical abuse does occur, especially when radical Hindu groups are involved, but not all persecution is physical. The worst form of persecution is likely to be the staggering mental pain and torment new converts are often forced to undergo within their local communities.

## Fear of the Future

Marriage is a serious issue of great weight among the HBBs. When he or she wants to get married, there is always a serious issue of whom he or she is going to marry. If this individual is a male, he needs to find another HBB within his own community, and it is very difficult to find a suitable partner. At the same time, his convictions will not allow him to marry a person from another faith. It is even more difficult for a female HBB to find a suitable boy.<sup>29</sup> More often than not, there is tremendous pressure from the family to marry someone from another faith. Most of the time, she is not allowed to make her own decision with regard to who she will marry. This struggle is a constant and continuous one.

Tragically, traditional Christians will not let their daughter or son marry a HBB. Even though there is preaching that all are one in Christ, when it comes to marriage, caste and tradition take exercise a role of primacy, as opposed to Christian doctrines of unity and fellowship.

Casteism in the existing churches, whether of Syrian background plus the others, or of converts from different ethnic backgrounds in the same church, is very visible. In certain denominations there may be no visible caste fights within the congregation or visible examples of one group dominating the other, but if a boy or girl is proposed for marriage, one family will be very eager to find out the social background of the other family seeking alliance. Even if the economic conditions of both families are the same; still the caste background of the other family is taken into consideration.<sup>30</sup>

Generally, the Christian community is very sympathetic towards the HBBs in terms of using spiritual language to articulate their concern and in providing superficial answers to their struggles. However, in terms of providing practical advice and help,

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<sup>29</sup> Arranged marriage is common in Kerala. When a girl wants to get married, usually a father searches for a bridegroom through a marriage agent or through family connections. This trend is slowly changing through urbanization and influence of media.

<sup>30</sup> George Samuel, "Caste in Kerala," *International Journal of Frontier Missions*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (1984): 310.

they distance themselves from them. In reality, most of the HBBs in Kerala marry people from the same background or are involved in cross-cultural marriages. The Church in Kerala has not yet made an impact on the Hindu community. "At present, the question of social backgrounds of the existing Christians and their forefathers is a very important one for the social life of Christians in Kerala."<sup>31</sup>

As McGavran pointed out, "People like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers."<sup>32</sup> This statement could not be more true in the context of Kerala. Most of the Hindus fear that when they become Christians, they will have to change their name and culture, and become deracinated from the social context they are familiar and comfortable with.

### **Personal Struggles**

Over the years, Christians have developed their own norms of cultural practices; when a new HBB comes to church, they try to force them into the mold. This represents an unnecessary and alienating clash of cultural paradigms and often ends up ostracizing HBBs. Here are some of the church's cultural practices that collide with those of the HBBs'.

Some churches believe that a change of name is an important part of conversion. The symbol of accepting Christianity is the changing of a Hindu name to a Christian name. Ashok Kumar suddenly becomes Patrick Robert Kumar. It is a common practice for anyone who accepts Christ to have his or her name changed. However, Hindus consider name changing synonymous to changing religion for material benefit. Name is

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<sup>31</sup> Samuel, "Caste in Kerala," 310.

<sup>32</sup> McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 163.

very much associated with the family tree, and a change of name is often seen as an active indication of the HBB's desire to dissociate himself from his communal roots.

The use of vermilion (*pottu*)<sup>33</sup> is forbidden among Christians. But for Hindus, those who do not put *pottu* on their foreheads are considered widows. Today, most women wear *pottu* as beauty enhancement. When they wear a red sari,<sup>34</sup> they use red *pottu* for primarily aesthetic purposes. The use of *pottu* is not realistically related to religion.

In Kerala, most of the believers are from Pentecostal or Brethren churches. For Sunday morning services, most of the ladies wear white saris. Hindus consider a woman wearing white sari a widow.

The use of ornaments is also forbidden among Christians. In Kerala, the majority of believers are from the Brethren or the Pentecostal Churches. Both of these churches are against the wearing of any ornaments - even wedding rings are considered "worldly!" However, the tradition of rich and elaborate bodily ornamentation is a deeply culturally embedded one among Indians and especially Hindus. Only widows refrain from the use of such ornaments. HBBs find Christians' view on ornaments unacceptable. Giving up wearing ornaments is unthinkable for many Hindus, and can present a serious barrier to the prospect of conversion. Only after much struggle do some HBBs give up their ornaments for the sake of Christian fellowship, as they will constantly have to grapple with family and communal pressure to comply with the social order in their community.

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<sup>33</sup> A red powdered spot on the forehead, also known as *tilak*.

<sup>34</sup> Sari is a six-meter long cloth Indian ladies wear.

Hindus also object to the Christian worship style, which differs radically from Hindu modes of worship. When Christians worship, especially among the Pentecostals, they beat a certain type of drum which the Hindus are extremely unfamiliar with. Other traditional churches only sing hymns that the Hindus associate only with funerals.<sup>35</sup>

Hindus often hold Christians responsible for polluting Indian culture. The food habits of Christians are contrary to Hindu food habits; for example, the eating of beef is not common among Hindus.

Certain sects of the Christian community also practice what is seen as excessive social mingling.<sup>36</sup> Some Indian movies portray a girl of loose morals as a Christian, often an Anglo-Indian<sup>37</sup> with a name like Sarah or Julie.

Extraction evangelism<sup>38</sup> is a cause of much unease among HBBs. A common difficulty in reaching out to the Hindus is the call for separation from their local community on becoming a Christian. Since Hinduism has not defined its beliefs and there is no way to determine its boundaries, it is difficult for a Hindu to understand what it means to leave his religion.

### **Present Status of Attempts to Reach and Make Disciples Among HBBs**

There is an urgent need to reach Hindus in Malabar:

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<sup>35</sup> Whenever my mother heard hymns from the radio, immediately she thought of funeral. This was because she heard hymns only when Christian funeral possessions passed by my home. On the way to the graveyard, hymns are sung. For her, hymns are death songs, not happy ones. She did not want to hear death songs from the radio or from the church.

<sup>36</sup> Anglo-Indian Community.

<sup>37</sup> In *Article 366(2)* of the Indian Constitution, "an Anglo-Indian" means a person whose father or any of whose other male progenitors in the male line is or was of European descent but who is domiciled within the territory of India and is or was born within such territory of parents habitually resident therein and not established there for temporary purposes only. *Article 366(2) in The Constitution Of India*, <http://www.indiankanoon.org/doc/255331/> (accessed 13 February 2011).

<sup>38</sup> Extraction evangelism encourages HBBs to come out of his home and join the Christian community. That means leaving home and community. This usually burns the bridge that link to home and community.

It is said, almost 90% of Christians today belong to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes of India, who are not of mainline Hinduism. And 90% of today's evangelistic missionary work is being carried out among the receptive tribals and scheduled castes that make perhaps 26% of India's population. Thus there has been little systematic evangelistic outreach ministry or at least not sufficient evangelistic ministry carried out among the mainline Hindus or caste Hindus who form almost 75% of the Hindu population.<sup>39</sup>

There is a marked difference between discipling HBBs and those who come from a nominal Christian background. HBBs do not have any knowledge of Christianity and whatever knowledge they have is heavily distorted.

Sometimes those who are born and brought up in a Christian family do not understand the struggles HBBs are going through. There is a need for Christians to deliberately make an effort to understand some of the aforementioned issues.

At the moment, deliberate disciple-making efforts among HBBs and on the part of the church is not evident. The lack of knowledge on how to handle the HBBs is the primary reason. Most of the HBBs eventually adopt the cultural norm of the church; others reluctantly join traditional churches.

A number of years ago, the writer started an organization known as Khrishtanugami Sangh, which means followers of Christ. This group was started because there was no organized program for new believers. Over the years, several training programs for HBBs were conducted. The programs were designed with an understanding of their socio-cultural background to ensure relevance in meeting their needs.

Eventually these new HBBs are going to be the leaders in the local church and future mission leaders. However, this inevitably takes time and one needs to be patient. "Character building takes time. There are no shortcuts. Two factors determine the

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<sup>39</sup> Martin Alphonse, *The Gospel for Hindus: A Study in Contextual Communication*. (Chennai: Mission Educational Books), 14.

length of time required for God to develop character worthy of spiritual leadership-trust in God and obedience to God."<sup>40</sup>

The church needs to learn how to welcome new HBBs into their local church. When Patrick Johnstone talks about social barriers, he has this to say: "...believers need to be liberated from the spirit of caste both to evangelize other social groups and welcome converts as brethren in their fellowships."<sup>41</sup> It is a sad reality that churches are unwilling to accept believers from a different background.

This project is organized into five chapters. Chapter one focuses on introducing the Malabar Hindus and the difficulties of evangelism among them. It also looks at some of the issues related to the problems of presenting the gospel and Hindu understanding of the gospel, which include cultural and sociological issues. It builds the framework of the issues of methods and practices of evangelism done among the Hindu community in Malabar and the reasons for the message of Christ not penetrating the community significantly.

Chapter two looks into theological understanding of different components, such as theology of evangelism, cross-cultural communication along with the need of pivotal understanding of the cultural issues involved. The uniqueness of Malabar Hindu culture plays a major role in every aspect of a Hindu's life.

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<sup>40</sup> Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership* (Nashville: Broadman, 2001), 54.

<sup>41</sup> Johnstone, *Operation*. 327.



The Hindu theological understanding of god plays a significant part in a Hindu's response to the gospel. There is a very unique concept of god known as *theyyam*<sup>42</sup> and the worship of an unknown god.

In Chapter three, the writer looks into various literature, especially literature covering the area of evangelism among Hindus. The writer also looks at some of the literature related to Hinduism, particularly those unique to Malabar Hindus.

He also looks into some of the contextual issues related to the thesis project and interacts with various authors from different backgrounds. The literature looks into the Hindu evangelism, discipleship and contextual evangelism methods from various angles. A wide spectrum of secular literature on different subjects related to the project will be examined.

Chapter four discusses the various methods used to identify issues. The writer made visits to Malabar area and seventy HBBs were interviewed. Interviews with Christian workers and leaders were also conducted in Malabar. In this chapter research methods will be spelled out in a non-technical format. The process of research rather than the outcomes is presented.

In Chapter five, interview and survey results are analyzed and the outcomes of the research are presented, recommending some practical ways to reach out to Malabar Hindus with different field-tested materials, and recommending some practical suggestions about reaching the Malabar Hindus in an effective way.

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<sup>42</sup> The name *theyyam* is derived from the Malayalam name for God (*daivam*). Theyyam is a very popular ritual dance form in Malabar. It is normally performed in temples known as *kavu*. There is no particular deity in *kavu*. God is represented by a metal rod or a tree. During the ritual the artist is considered as God and people ask for blessings as if they are talking to God. The influence of *theyyam* is discussed more in chapter two.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Twenty-five years ago, more than twenty people were baptized with the writer. We all came from the same background<sup>1</sup> but today, only a few of us are walking closely with the Lord. When persecution and struggles started to emerge, many could not stand firm. Local Christian leaders did not know how to handle new believers from a Hindu background, so they encouraged HBBs to join mission organizations. A few of them did join a mission organization, and through rigorous theological and practical training, established a strong foundation in the faith. The others did not have the same privilege. An understanding of the theological framework of Christianity plays an important role in the lives of new believers.

The writer has lived the first half of his life in a Hindu family and the other half in a Christian community where he learned about the basic tenets of Christianity. Over the years, he has interacted not only with many Hindus who have decided to follow Christ and but also those who are still practicing their religion at different levels.

For new HBBs to stay in their own families after they have found the new faith is indeed a challenge. There is tremendous familial and communal pressure. The writer understands the struggles of these brothers and sisters because he has been in the same situation. Becoming a Christian means entering what may prove to be a constant struggle for many HBBs. It is therefore critical to teach HBBs basic theology to build up their faith.

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<sup>1</sup> Hindu background. From here onwards, author will use the term HBB as an abbreviation for "Hindu Background Believer".

## Evangelism

There can be many definitions of evangelism. One familiar and simple one is provided by D.T. Niles: "one beggar telling another where to get food."<sup>2</sup> David Watson<sup>3</sup> Michael Green<sup>4</sup> and J.I.Packer<sup>5</sup> point towards this famous definition given by the Archbishops' Committee in 1918, in its report on the evangelistic work of the church: "To evangelize is also to present Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit, that men shall come to put their trust in God through him, to accept him as their Saviour, and serve him as their King in the fellowship of his Church."

Determining the precise definition of evangelism is an understandably complex task, as illustrated by the variety of definitions available above. However, at its most fundamental, the basic meaning of this term can be distilled from an examination of its etymological origins. "The basic word for *evangelism* in the New Testament is the term translated into the English as "evangel" (noun) or "evangelize" (verb). The verb form is seen several ways. The term *euangelizo* means "I communicate good news."<sup>6</sup>

Evangelism is not something manmade and which people undertake out of obligation to other individuals. It is an obligation of every believer in Christ to fulfill the great commission and share the good news to others. It is a divine command, not a worldly contractual obligation. Effective evangelism must also be acutely aware of the cultural and geographical context in which the gospel is being preached in order to

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<sup>2</sup> Alvin Reid, *Introduction To Evangelism* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers), 12.

<sup>3</sup> Archbishops' Committee of Enquiry on the Evangelistic Work of the Church, p.25. Quoted by David Watson, *I Believe in Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 25.

<sup>4</sup> He acknowledges that the definition is from Archbishop William Temple. Michael Green, *New Testament Evangelism: Lessons for Today*, (Manila: OMF Literature, 1982), 9-10.

<sup>5</sup> J.I.Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1963), 37-38.

<sup>6</sup> Reid, *Introduction To Evangelism*, 9.

present the gospel in an appropriate manner that does not undermine cultural sensitivities.

The Biblical role of evangelism is unequivocal; the Bible clearly establishes the basic principles and objectives underlying how the gospel will be spread. The Bible states that Jesus came into this world to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). In his letter to Galatians, apostle Paul said, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." (Gal 4:4-5.) It is possible to see the very fact of Jesus' existence in this world as the precursor to a global act of evangelism.

The Biblical concept of evangelism is also catholic in nature. The Bible clearly says that, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Salvation through access to the gospel is not rationed by race or prior religion, which means he includes in his grand plan for salvation the Hindus of Malabar. Presenting the gospel to every potential believer in Malabar must be seen as a priority. Evangelism may be done by mere human beings but giving faith is his work.

### Evangelist

The term "evangelist" is only found three times in the New Testament. Philip was the only person named as an evangelist in the New Testament (Acts 21:8), and provides us with a useful model upon which we can base our definition of the ideal evangelist.

In Acts 6:3 Philip was described as having a good reputation and being full of Holy Spirit. Roger Carswell identifies the defining qualities of an evangelist based on passages from Acts chapter eight "Philip was obedient to the Lord's leading (vv.26-27); he was looking for opportunities (v. 28); he was led by the Holy Spirit (v. 29); he waited for guidance (v. 29); he was courteous (vv. 30-31); his approach was simple (vv.32-34); he was scriptural (v. 35), and he looked for faith before publicly baptizing new converts (v. 37)."<sup>7</sup>

### **Disciple**

There may be different definitions of disciple. "A disciple is a student or follower of Jesus. A disciple has decided to submit at least one other person under appropriate conditions in order to become like that person as that person follows Christ."<sup>8</sup>

1. A disciple submits to a teacher who teaches her how to follow Jesus.
2. A Disciple learns Jesus' Words.
3. A Disciple learns Jesus' way of ministry.
4. A Disciple imitates Jesus' life and character.
5. A disciple finds and teaches other disciples who also follow Jesus.<sup>9</sup>

According to Bill Hull, discipleship provides the platform for the following:

1. relationship to nurture
2. apprenticeship for competence
3. accountability for tasks
4. submission for shaping
5. wisdom for decision making<sup>10</sup>

Discipleship is always a costly affair, and guidelines should be formulated before the launch of any discipleship program. William MacDonald recommends these:

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<sup>7</sup> Roger Carswell, *And Some . . . Evangelists* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 50.

<sup>8</sup> Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 68.

<sup>9</sup> Hull, *The Complete Book*, 68.

<sup>10</sup> Hull, *The Complete Book*, 53.

1. A supreme love for Jesus Christ
2. A denial of self
3. A deliberate choosing of the cross
4. A life spent in following Christ
5. A fervent love for all who belong to Christ
6. An unswerving continuance in His Word
7. A forsaking of all to follow Him<sup>11</sup>

Discipling new believers takes time and effort. Discipling new HBBs is vital:

Reproduction through discipling is the pattern of the evangelistic explosion all through the Acts. Though attention centers upon a few leading spirits who are setting the pace, the real work of multiplication comes through the steady, unpretentious, faithful witness of the brethren. Meetings for fellowship, worship, and studying were just the catalyst for church outreach. It was in the marketplaces, the shops, along the streets and alleyways, where the people lived everyday, that the world was being turned upside down.<sup>12</sup>

The concept of discipleship is thoroughly Eastern and Indian. It holds a deep appeal to the Indian psyche. The Indian mind estimates the genuineness of a spiritual message by the degree to which it is practiced and therefore concretized. The person or community practicing a spiritual discipline (*Sadhana*) is referred to as a Sadhak. Indians respect only those messengers who embody the message they proclaim.<sup>13</sup>

Over the years the author has conducted a number of training programs for HBBs. One of the criteria for my selection of participants for training programs is that the participants should be HBBs. These are the vision, objectives and training outcomes:

Vision:

- Building up HBB to follow Jesus
- Multiplying authentic followers of Christ among HBB

Objectives:

- To reach Hindus in Kerala, especially in Malabar area for Jesus Christ
- To train and equip those who came to know the Lord from Hindu background to fulfill the great commission
- To bring a greater unity among those who are from Hindu background and share common vision

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<sup>11</sup> William MacDonald, *True Discipleship* (Bromley: STL Books, 1974), 10-13.

<sup>12</sup> Robert E. Colman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1998), 77.

<sup>13</sup> Sam Lazarus, ed., *Proclaiming the Christ: A Handbook of Indigenous Missions in India* (Madras: Church Growth Association of India, 1992), 45-46.

- To provide opportunities for Christian fellowship

#### Training Outcomes:

- Seekers becoming committed followers of Christ
- A family of HBBs growing mature in Christ who assist spiritual seekers to come to know Christ

### **Gospel**

Gospel, literally translated, simply means good news. In the Gospel of Mark, sinners are exhorted to "Repent and believe in the good news" Mark 1:15. The gospel is a message asking people to repent from their sins and accept the forgiveness of Christ, provided through the grace of God and his death on the cross. Throughout scripture, this theme is clearly seen.

- John the Baptist preached a message of repentance. "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near. Matt 3:1-2
- Jesus preached. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." Matt 4:17
- At Pentecost, Peter asked the people to repent. Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22
- Apostle Paul also preached the message of repentance. Acts 1:30; 20:21; 26:20

There are many ways of explaining the gospel plan, but the core is always the same. Navigators' defined Gospel plan emerged with the following six points which must be contained within the message of the gospel:

1. The fact of sin: Romans 3:23; 3:11, 12
2. The price of sin: Romans 6:23; 5:12; Gal 3:10
3. The price must be paid: Hebrews 9:27; Romans 2:12; Hebrews 2:2-3
4. The price has been paid by Christ: Romans 5:8; 1 Peter 3:18; Galatians 3:13
5. Salvation is a free gift: Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 3:24; Titus 3:5
6. Salvation must be received: John 1:12; Revelation 3:20; Romans 10:9-10.<sup>14</sup>

As Lloyd-Jones reaffirms:

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<sup>14</sup> *Topical memory System*, Guidebook 1 (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1969), 19. Quoted by Thomas Paul Johnson in his book, *Examining Billy Graham's Theology of Evangelism* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 185.

Evangelism must start with the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the demands of the law, the punishment meted out by the law and the eternal consequences of evil and wrong-doing. It is only the man who is brought to see his guilt in this way who flies to Christ for deliverance and redemption. Any belief in the Lord Jesus Christ which is not based on that is not a true belief in Him.<sup>15</sup>

The universality of the gospel message is a key characteristic that the Bible establishes: "The Father sent the son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14). His ambition is for "all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). Jesus "died for all" (2 Cor 5:15).

### **The Concept of the Incarnation**

Jesus made it clear during his ministry why he became flesh:

- "Then the angel said to them, 'Do not afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord'" (Luke 2:10-11).
- "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).
- "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29)
- "For the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10)."<sup>16</sup>

Herbert Kane<sup>17</sup> gives us the three purposes of His incarnation.

The first purpose was to reveal God the Father. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." (John 14:6-7)

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<sup>15</sup> D.Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 235 – 236.

<sup>16</sup> Reid, *Introduction To Evangelism*, 30.

<sup>17</sup> J. Herbert Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 35-36.



The second purpose of the Incarnation was to destroy the devil. Man is not only a sinner in bondage to sin (Rom 7:14-20), he is also a slave to Satan and a captive in his kingdom of darkness (Matt 12:25-29). John in his first epistle says: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (3:8).

The third purpose of the Incarnation was to save the world, not just the Jewish people. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." (John 3:16-17). John in his first epistle says: "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world." (4:14). Jesus Himself regarded His impending death as having universal appeal. "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." (John 12:32). Again He said, "just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matt 20:28).

### **The Concept of the Incarnation (*avartar*) in Hinduism**

In Hindu scripture the concept of incarnation holds a very different significance from when it is used in a Christian context.

"Avatar" is a beautiful Sanskrit term, and refers to "a 'down-coming', a descent, a manifestation of the divine in human form."<sup>18</sup> In common usage it refers to the incarnation of a certain Hindu deity, and the vast majority of Hindus are very familiar with this term. Among the Christian community there is a propensity to shy away from this term, though as a word it is perfectly adequate in describing Christ. The meaning of

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<sup>18</sup> Geoffrey Parrinder, *Avatar and Incarnation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 14.

this term is not restricted to Hindu contexts, though the concept of incarnation is imbued with differing significance within the contexts of Christianity and Hinduism.

The simplest meaning of *avatar* is incarnation. The popular understanding of *avatar*, known as "*dasavatar*", finds its origins in the narrative of the Bhagwat Purana, where Vishnu is reincarnated a number of times. *Avatara* (Vishnu in his reincarnated forms) progresses from animal to human through his reincarnations, starting from the form of a fish, and, over the course of nine reincarnations, progressing to the form of a human. Most of these *avatars* are mythological characters and have little historical significance, a contrast to the historical foundations of Christ.

The purpose of the avatar is different in Hinduism and Christianity. Most of the avatars that appear in Hinduism exist for a purpose that draws a strict dichotomy between those who are damned and those who will be saved, a purpose which often offers little prospect of redemption: to kill the wicked and save the righteous. According to the Bhagvat Gita,<sup>19</sup> "Whenever spirituality decays and materialism is rampant, then O Arjuna! I reincarnate Myself. To protect the righteous, to destroy the wicked, and to establish the kingdom of God, I am reborn from age to age." (Bhagvat Gita 4:7-8.) Crucially, the concept of the *avatar* as used within a Hindu context does not denote a unique occurrence; though each *avatar* is different, they reappear multiple times to fulfill a purpose that is not one-off in nature. "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." (John 3:17).

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<sup>19</sup> Hindu holy scripture, part of the Mahabharata, one of two major Sanskrit epics of India, the other being the Ramayana. Presented as a dialogue between the warrior prince Arjuna and his divine charioteer Krishna, it stresses the importance of doing one's duty and of faith in God.

In Indian *guruism*, the *avatar* concept is very real. Certain gurus claim without reservation that they are the *avatars* of deities. Sai Baba<sup>20</sup> claims that he is the incarnation of Shridi Sai Baba and extends his lineage to include Christ Jesus, effectively claiming that he was the Christ in a past life.<sup>21</sup> This is a very strong demonstration of the extent to which the *avatar* exists for many Hindus not as a mere concept, but as an accepted fact of the real world.

It is important to understand the concept of incarnation in Hinduism because such an understanding allows us to appreciate the differences between the Hindu and biblical concepts of incarnation. An explanation of these differences within the context of an otherwise familiar concept is indispensable when demonstrating the uniqueness of Christ to the Malabar Hindus.

### **Theology of Contextualization**

The Gospel should be relevant to every culture. As Hiebert puts it, "On the one hand, the gospel belongs to no culture. It is God's revelation of himself and his acts to all people. On the other hand, it must always be understood and expressed within human cultural forms. There is no way to communicate it apart from human thought patterns and languages."

We need to understand the Bible in a cultural and historical context for the message be made relevant to the audience. The biblical cultural setting is one drastically

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<sup>20</sup> A popular Indian guru.

<sup>21</sup> Vishal Mangalwadi, *The World of Gurus: A Critical Look at the Philosophies of India's Influential Gurus and Mystics* (Mumbai: GLS Press, 1999), 135, 139.

different from today's. Hiebert points out that "The message of the Bible is supracultural – it is above all cultures. But it must be understood and applied in all cultures."<sup>22</sup>

Evangelism has never been done in a vacuum, and it is futile to attempt to convey it in one. Our message should be appropriate to the people. Very often, attempts at evangelism fail not because people reject the gospel but because they are hostile to what they see as the corollaries of accepting the Gospel – the adoption of a culture that is unfamiliar and alien. At its most axiomatic, the message of the gospel has remained unchanged for the last two thousand years. There is no need to modify or change its message, only the manner in which we present it to communities. We have to modify our strategies. Sadhu Sunder Singh's parable illustrates the concept well:

A high caste Hindu...had fainted one day from the summer heat while sitting on a train in a railway station. A train employee ran to a water faucet, filled a cup with water and brought it to the man in an attempt to revive him. But in spite of his condition, the Hindu refused. He would rather die than accept water in the cup of someone from another caste. Then someone else noticed that the high caste passenger had left his own cup on the seat beside him. So he grabbed it, filled it with water and returned to offer it to the panting heat victim who immediately accepted the water with gratitude.<sup>23</sup>

The Hindu was not rejecting the offer of water per se, only the vessel within which it was carried. The water saved his life just as the Gospel can save the Malabar Hindus, but it will only be accepted if we can present it within their cultural context, not outside of it. Drake sums up the point well: "Effective evangelism requires an understanding of our cultural context, sensitivity to the needs of people, awareness of the radical demands of the Gospel, and willingness to commit ourselves to it."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), xvii.

<sup>23</sup> K.P. Yohannan, *Revolution in World Missions* (Carrollton: GFA Books, 2004), 144.

<sup>24</sup> John Drake, *Evangelism for a New Age: Creating Churches for the Net Century*, (Hammersmith: Marshall Pickering, 1994), 58.

Theologically it is right to share the gospel beginning from the point of human depravity and the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. The problem occurs when the Malabar Hindus hear words such as "sin, blood, death, eternal life". Such words often raise more questions than they answer, precisely because they are so culturally foreign. What seem intuitive meanings to us can prove very difficult to convey without risking the incredulity of the Malabar Hindus. Acts seventeen gives us the perfect model of presenting Christ in a manner that avoids the problems of cross-cultural evangelism and yet presents a holistic and accurate portrayal of the central doctrines of Christianity.

1. God is a Creator and Lord of the universe. "The God who make the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth" (17:24a).
2. God is self-sufficient. "and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else" (17:24b-25).
3. God made the whole human race out of a common stock: "From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth" (17:26a).
4. God is sovereign over the nations: "and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" (17:26b).
5. God implanted a thirst for the divine in human beings: God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him (17:27a).
6. God is accessible to humans: "though he is not far from each one of us" (17:27b).
7. Humans depend on God for their existence: "For in him we live and move and have our being" (17:28a).
8. Humans derive their life from God: "As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring'" (17:28b).
9. God cannot be represented by an idol: "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone-an image made by man's design and skill" (17:29).
10. Though God may have overlooked the ignorance of idolatry in the past He now expects repentance from everyone: "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent" (17:30).
11. God will one day judge the world through Christ: "For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed" (17:31).
12. God has demonstrated the validity of His gospel through the resurrection of Christ: "He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (17:32).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ajith Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 2001), 96 - 97.

## Understanding Hindus in Malabar

Hinduism is known as *Sanatana Dharma*.<sup>26</sup> It is not one religion but a multi-religious development which has developed over thousands of years and can be considered a kind of social structure, with its complex and strange mixture of ideas, ideologies, assumptions, assertions, philosophic concepts and religious convictions.

There is no single way to describe a religion as multifariously complex as Hinduism, especially since it is no way a monolithic concept. At least eight types of Hinduism can be traced in Malabar.

### Philosophical Hinduism<sup>27</sup>

This form of Hinduism is dominated by the authority of the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* (scriptures). Concerning the understanding of the Ultimate Reality (*Brahman*)<sup>28</sup>, there are three popular schools of thought.

Advaita	-	non-dualism
Dvaita	-	dualism
Visishatadvaita	-	modified dualism

However, all teach that there is a spark of divinity in man, and hence to call a man sinner is blasphemous; there is then no need for a redeemer. In Malabar not many people practice philosophic Hinduism.

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<sup>26</sup> Eternal religion.

<sup>27</sup> Also known as classical Hinduism.

<sup>28</sup> The eternal, unchanging, infinite, immanent, and transcendent reality which is the Divine Ground of all matter, energy, time, space, and being. Also known as "ultimate reality".

## Religious Hinduism

This is very popular and many Hindus fall under this category. They believe in the scriptural authority of the *Puranas* (Epics), namely, the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and *Bhagavad Gita*. Much importance is given to *avatars*.<sup>29</sup> They may believe that these epics are divine in origin. They choose their own *ishtadevata*.<sup>30</sup>

They also teach that man is free to choose his own god from among a pantheon of gods, and to worship any number of gods. They also believe that one can attain salvation in three different ways:

Gnanamarga	(Way of knowledge)
Bhaktimarga	(Way of devotion)
Karmamarga	(Way of good deeds)

Most of the Malabar Hindus personally subscribe to the Bhaktimarga. They devote themselves to worshipping their favorite deity for their own benefit.

## Popular Hinduism

The majority of Hindus fall under this group. This is experienced-based, not necessarily scripture-based. Gods and goddesses are a part of the belief system. More people are more familiar with the *Bhagvat Puranas* than with the Bhagvat Gita. The *Puranas* feature a wealth of stories for which there is very little historical evidence.

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<sup>29</sup> Avatar or avatars are interchangeably used to describe manifestations of God. This term can also loosely translate into incarnations.

<sup>30</sup> Sanskrit term, denoting a personal God.

### Guruism<sup>31</sup>

This version of Hinduism revolves around the central presence of a *guru* whose dictates are taken as religious writ. Gurus with mystical experience draw many people to them. They claim to be associated with *avatars* and to possess supernatural power.

"There are any number self proclaimed gurus who are seriously considered as incarnations of God or one in whom God bodily. They are worshipped and followed as divine beings by thousands of devotees."<sup>32</sup>

### Secular Hinduism

Those who belong to this group are generally nominal in their beliefs and are indifferent to religious practices. Even the few religious customs that they follow are motivated by material gains, parental influence or family ties. Most of the Indian communists fall under this category.

### Hindu Sects

There are numerous Hindu sects, *Shivism*, *Vaishnavism* and *Shaktism* being some examples. While these sects remain within Hinduism, some of the reformed movements became independent religions: Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism.

Of particular note is Swami Ayappa, a famous and popular Hindu sect. Every year, members wear black clothes for up to two months and climb a certain mountain to receive blessings. They also reject a conventional lifestyle, choosing instead to lead a

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<sup>31</sup> Guruism refers to the ideology and philosophy of a guru.

<sup>32</sup> Martin Alphonse, *The Gospel for Hindus: A Study in Contextual Communication*. (Chennai: Mission Educational Books), 29.



monastic life during these two months. Every year, millions of Hindus follow the practices of this sect.

#### Animistic / Folk Beliefs

Hindus who fall under this category are influenced by animism, spiritism, occult and animal worship. Fear of the unknown exercises its instinctive dread over the followers' minds. These believers are very much part of the tribal belt.

#### Hindutva (Hinduness)

This is a radical Hindu militant group in Malabar, heavily hostile to other religions and possessing close associations with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Indian Nationalist political party. They are extremely aggressive in their approach, and have torched churches and used violence as a means of persecuting Christians. They are well-organized, politically driven and missionary-minded.

#### **Theyyam**

*Theyyam* plays very important part in the lives of Malabar Hindus. This is a ritualistic dance, well-preserved over time with its unique make-up and costume, lively foot work and gymnastic fervor. It is an endemic dance form that is unique to Malabar and found nowhere else in India.

Theyyam is normally performed in a *kavu*.<sup>33</sup> The name *theyyam* is derived from

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<sup>33</sup> The *Kavu* is a building very similar in design to a temple. The main difference is that in a *kavu* there is no idol; God is represented by a stone, sword or simple cloth.

the Malayalam name for God.<sup>34</sup> During the ritual the artist is considered to become God and people ask the artist for blessings as if they were literally talking to God. "The gods and goddesses are supposed to come in our midst through the medium of the possessed dancers and converse with us on matters of even contemporary significance."<sup>35</sup> *Theyyam* has great influence in the everyday life of Hindus.

In *theyyam* there are no fixed deities; stones or metal rods are supposed to represent their presence. Significantly, many *theyyam* narratives are embedded in the history of Malabar. "Each teyyam tells us about his-story, the history of North Malabar."<sup>36</sup>

Even the members of the communist party go to *kavu* to receive blessings through the *theyyam*. Because the *theyyam* is so deeply rooted in local culture, many communists do not see any contradiction in participation in the *theyyam* and their official communist ideology, even though the *theyyam* is fundamentally a human creation. "*Theyyam* is essentially a human creation; it has an absolute relationship with man in giving vent to his strong feelings against injustice and wickedness and his desire to maintain the well-being of the society."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Daivam*.

<sup>35</sup> G.Rajasekharan, ed., *District Handbooks of Kerala: Kannur* (Tiruvananthapuram: Department of Information and Public Relations, March 2003), 43.

<sup>36</sup> The Anthropologist: International Journal of Contemporary and Applied Studies of man, "Teyyam is the Best Tool for Reconstructing the History of North Malabar.", <http://www.krepublishers.com/02-Journals/T-Anth/Anth-10-0-000-08-Web/Anth-10-4-000-08-Abst-PDF/Anth-10-4-283-08-479-Damodaran-M-P/Anth-10-4-283-08-479-Damodaran-M-P-Tt.pdf> (accessed January 10, 2010), 284.

<sup>37</sup> G.Rajasekharan, *District Handbooks*, 44.

## Worldview

Until we get into the Hindu mind, it is hard to understand the Hindu worldview. A world view is "the way people see or perceive the world, the way they 'know' it to be."<sup>38</sup> Traditional Christian perception of the Hindu worldview is very negative, as Hindus are perceived to be idol worshippers.

However, there is no one Hindu worldview and there is no official Hindu worldview. Every Hindu defines his or her own worldview. The author was born and brought up in a Hindu family, and there was a variety of Hindu worldviews in his family. His mother and grandmother were very much involved in popular *bhakti*<sup>39</sup> Hinduism, while his brother followed Gurusim closely, leading others deeper into spiritual life.

These are some defining aspects of Hinduism that are encountered among the Hindus of Malabar.

## Eternal Life

This terminology is familiar to many Hindus in Malabar. Many Hindus do not want eternal life. For the Hindu, eternal life brings with it connotations of infinite misery because of the concept of reincarnation; life never ends, but is transferred from one mode of existence to another. In a previous life, the Hindu may have been a cow or a rat, and he does not know what to expect from his next life. Escaping from the eternal cycle of death and rebirth is the ultimate goal of the Hindu; eternal life seems more like a curse than a blessing.

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<sup>38</sup> David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 125.

<sup>39</sup> The term *bhakti* can be translated into devotion or worship.

## All Religions are the Same.

Hindus believe that all religions are essentially the same and that all religions lead to God. For the Hindu, there is never any genuine need to adopt a new faith. The common Hindu man thinks that Christianity (Roman Catholicism, Protestant denominations and other Christian cults) is no better than any Hindu religion.

## Doctrine of Deeds (Karma) and Incarnation

Hindus believe that behavior in the past determines fate in the present, and deeds in the present determine the future. The cycles of rebirths keep recurring until finally *moksha*<sup>40</sup> is attained. Hindus also believe that from time to time, *Bhagwan*<sup>41</sup> appears in this world to destroy the wicked and save the righteous.<sup>42</sup> Jesus is often considered one of the many *avatars* of *Bhagwan*; in other words, Hindus will readily accept his humanity. They generally respect him and consider him another good *Guru*. It is not necessarily true, therefore, that Hindus perceive Christianity in a negative fashion.

## Bhakti (devotion) and Reverence for Scripture

*Bhakti*, a doctrine of Hindu salvation, is embraced by two thirds of India's masses.

The word *bhakti* is a derivative of the root *bhaj* which is used to express complete surrender or servitude (*seva*). It signifies the state of submission to the Lord with body, mind and words...The full meaning of the word *bhakti* is also

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<sup>40</sup> Salvation.

<sup>41</sup> God.

<sup>42</sup> This concept is from Hindu holy book Bhagvat Gita. "Whenever spirituality decays and materialism is rampant, then O Arjuna! I incarnate Myself. To protect the righteous, to destroy the wicked, and to establish the kingdom of God, I am reborn from age to age." Bhagvat Gita 4:7-8. *Bhagavad Gita: Annotated & Explained*, Translation by Shri Purohit Swami (Woodstock: SkyLight Paths Publishing; 2002), 33.

derived from another nuance of the meaning of the root *bhaj*, namely 'to become a part of (something)'. Here the implied meaning is that a devotee at the individual level is a part of the Supreme Lord and is supposed to communicate the efficacy of *bhakti* to other individuals.<sup>43</sup>

Indian theologian A.J.Appasamy is the Indian Christian who recognized *bhakti* more than anyone else.<sup>44</sup> He says that our response to Christ's command: "abide you in my love" (John 15:9) should be *bhakti* towards him "because *bhakti* is personal and it engages our whole personality, our will, feeling and thought."<sup>45</sup>

*Bhakti* is the combination of supreme knowledge, true friendship towards God, which is the path towards *mukti*.<sup>46</sup> The Srimad Bhagwata is the Bible of the devotees of *bhakti* in Hinduism. It illustrates various kinds of modes of developing *bhakti*. Self-surrender is the highest form of *bhakti*.

The concept of *bhakti* further extends in most cases to a respect for holy writ; Hindus generally revere sacred writings and holy books. They will listen attentively to an exposition of Scripture if we are willing to explain it without any prejudice. Hindus often approach Christ and the Christian Scriptures with an attitude of worshipful respect.

## Challenge

Evangelism has always been hard work; early apostles paid with their lives. Evangelism is the proclamation of good news but at the same time it is also a message that redefines an individual's personal destiny, and often comes sharply into conflict

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<sup>43</sup> Karel Werner, *Love Divine: Studies in Bhakti and Devotional Mysticism* (Richmond Surrey: Curzon Press, 1993), 86.

<sup>44</sup> Robin Boyd dedicated entire chapter on his book, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology* explaining A.J.Appasamy's view on Christianity as *bhakti marga* (110-140)

<sup>45</sup> R.H.S.Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 123.

<sup>46</sup> This word can be used interchangeably as *moksha*. The word means "salvation".

against worldly hierarchies of power and authority. Our enemy is real. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Eph 6:12)

What makes evangelism that is targeted towards the Malabar Hindus unique is that fact that Hinduism shares so many subtle differences and similarities with Christianity. We witness an entire spectrum of Hindu concepts that range from wholly applicable to Christianity, to those that must be applied with modification, and those that are diametrically opposed to Christianity. The notion of *bhakti*, for instance, is something that can be preserved wholesale from Hinduism, as it brings with it very precise and culturally compelling connotations of devotion and true personal understanding that Christianity has always espoused. The concepts of the *avatar* and of Eternal Life within Hinduism, though possessing relevance to Christianity that cannot be dismissed, need to be modified when applied in a Christian context; the *avatar* of Christ needs to be given its unique purpose and have its singular nature as the only bodily representation of God established, while the notion of "eternal life" needs to be stripped of its negative associations with a cycle of eternal rebirth, and be represented as an escape from mere physical existence, not an entrapment into it. Finally, concepts like the "doctrine of deeds" and the perception of all religions as being fundamentally similar cannot be held on to during conversion, and must be gently but firmly discarded.

To communicate the gospel to the Malabar Hindu, then, is a complex task that needs to grapple with all these concepts. An evangelist cannot simply dismiss Hinduism and its concepts; this will only alienate the Hindu he seeks to come closer to, and ignores many of the useful concepts and ideas Hinduism possesses that are in no way

inimical to Christianity and can be used to convey important Christian concepts in a way that is accurate and yet culturally informed. Neither can the evangelist fall into the trap of assuming that Hinduism and Christianity do not diverge in very significant ways; he needs, for instance, to point out that Christ is not just another one in a long line of divine *avatars*, but a unique and unreplicable Son of God who is also the Son of Man. The best possible means of evangelism navigates between these similarities and differences with a deft hand, keeping what is helpful and changing or discarding what is not. It will also utilize traditional artistic and narrative modes such as the *theyyam* to convey in terms of parable the central episodes of the Bible and their meaning to the Christian.

The transition to discipleship is one that can be streamlined if concepts like *bhakti*, for instance, are employed as a means of encouraging individuals to enter a close, respectful, committed personal relationship with God. The respect that Hindus have for scripture also informs the attitude that they should possess when reading the Bible for the first time. Often, the barriers to discipleship today take not the form of opposition to the messages of Christianity per se, but how these concepts are portrayed as bring in constant opposition to those of Hinduism, when in fact this tension may be far smaller or in some instances, not exist at all.

In conclusion, therefore, the central challenge of evangelism targeted at the Malabar Hindus is to employ cultural and religious contextualization that is nuanced enough to differentiate between Hindu concepts that may or may not be helpful in Christian life, and accurately communicate the central tenets of Christianity without alienating or ostracizing the Hindu.

CHAPTER 3  
LITERATURE REVIEW

**Good News**

*Could a mariner sit idle if he heard the drowning cry?  
Could a doctor sit in comfort and just let his patients die?  
Could a fireman sit idle, let men burn and give no hand?  
Can you sit at ease in Zion with the world around you DAMNED?<sup>1</sup>*

-Leonard Ravenhill

Sharing our faith with strangers is always difficult. The fear of offending others is a reality. Today everyone defines his or her worldview. Religion is a private matter and must not be brought into the public sphere. The world is much more complex. The absolute claims of Christ are rejected. The moral goalposts are always shifting. The central problem we face is to present the gospel where people subscribe to pluralist worldviews. "In a pluralist society such as ours, any confident statement of ultimate belief, any claim to announce the truth about God and his purpose for the world, is liable to be dismissed as ignorant, dogmatic."<sup>2</sup> "Pluralism has bred an understanding of 'niceness' that is very dangerous. Pluralism keeps people from the truth that sets them free (John 8:32)."<sup>3</sup>

Every religion superficially may appear similar but despite appearances, they are all fundamentally different. In John's gospel we see some of the absolute claims of Christ; "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except

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<sup>1</sup> Leonard Ravenhill, *Why Revival Tarries* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1959), 90.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Ajith Fernando, *Sharing the Truth in Love* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers. 2001). 110.



through me" (John 14:6). His are claims are exclusive. As Ravi Zacharias points out, "First and foremost, He asserted there is only one way to God. That shocks postmodern moods and mind-sets. Hinduism and Bahaism have long challenged the concept of a single way to God. The Hindu religion, with its multifaceted belief system, vociferously attacks such exclusivity."<sup>4</sup> In other words "Christianity is unique among the religions of the world in that it consists not of man seeking God, but God seeking men."<sup>5</sup>

In this current society everything is relative. "The relativism which is not willing to speak about the truth but only about 'what is true for me' is an evasion of the serious business of living. It is the mark of a tragic loss of nerve in our contemporary culture. It is a preliminary symptom of death."<sup>6</sup> This will bring a tendency to preach a diluted gospel. It is easier to preach a social gospel than to present the uniqueness of Christ. However, our Gospel is not a social gospel, and our programs should be tailored towards bringing people into His footsteps. Social work may bring people closer to God but only the gospel can save people from eternal punishment. There is a great tendency emerging in India toward growing social work. This primarily appeals to masses in the West, thus bringing sympathy and money into missionary organizations. It is not uncommon to find on the website of a missionary organization operating in India the piteous images of starving, malnourished children or a beggar pleading for alms on the roadside. More often than not, India is portrayed as being little short of a beggars' colony.

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<sup>4</sup> Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 2000), 4-5.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Hendrickson, *Disciples Are Made Not Born* (Singapore: The Navigators, 1992), 43

<sup>6</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel*, 22.

As former IMA<sup>7</sup> General Secretary K. Rajendran prophetically said in his writing on *Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, "...since 1987 the amount of social work performed by missions has increased dramatically. It also implies that in the future, social work might grow more than direct evangelism. This change in focus is related to the holistic approach in evangelism."<sup>8</sup> He then gives this warning "The increase in social work needs to be watched and a balance maintained, or else missions could become merely social organizations."<sup>9</sup> Coleman rightly said: "Merely restructuring social programs without changing the perverted lifestyle of persons who participate in them does not produce righteousness or give people real peace and joy. The ultimate need of a lost society cannot be met apart from supernatural grace and the discipling of men and women in the narrow way of Christ."<sup>10</sup>

Only the gospel can change people at a level that is truly intrinsic. "The primary task is evangelism, the direct preaching of the gospel in words-spoken or written. Action for social justice and peace may be a way of drawing people to hear the gospel, but it is not an intrinsic part of the gospel itself. The preaching of the gospel of salvation from sin and of the offer of eternal life is the primary business of the Church."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> India Missions Associations is the national federation of missions in India, which assists missions and churches in the proclamation of the gospel and making disciples of Jesus Christ among all peoples, languages and geographical areas through members who partner to share resources, research and training by their effective accountability and care of their personnel. At present IMA represents 220 Indian mission organizations, agencies and church groups and more than 40,000 Christian workers within India and beyond.

<sup>8</sup> William D. Taylor, ed., *Global Missiology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Iguassu Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 311.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, *Global Missiology*, 311.

<sup>10</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1988), 81-82.

<sup>11</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel*, 135.

Christians cannot win hearts and minds of nonbelievers by showing them what is wrong with their religion. There are some levels of truth in every religion that we can and should confirm, even though these truths alone do not bring them eternal life. We should not be afraid to affirm the good things in other religions. "It is because we believe in the supremacy of Christ that we are not afraid to affirm what is good in other faiths."<sup>12</sup>

We who seek to evangelize need to be sensitive to people from other faiths. In the status quo, however, there is a general tendency when discussing other religions to focus merely on those aspects which Christians find inimical or repulsive. Herbert Hoefer offers us this fascinating insight:

There was self-critique concerning some missionaries' evangelistic techniques. The criticism I heard was directed primarily at the independent Pentecostal Indian missionaries, who often have very little formal education. Their public sermons can be harshly critical – often quite ignorantly – concerning Hindu religious practices. We are not called to ridicule others, but to proclaim the Gospel. Ridicule can only build up defenses against the message. Ignorant and offensive ridicule deserves to be resented and opposed.<sup>13</sup>

One of the reasons people do not share the gospel with others is a lack of knowledge of Scripture and of other belief systems.

We must know the gospel thoroughly and communicate it faithfully and clearly. We must also know the world thoroughly. This knowledge of the world becomes the context in which we present the gospel. So when we proclaim the gospel, we constantly interact with the aspirations, beliefs, and practices of our audience. A good witness, then, is a student of both the Word and the world.<sup>14</sup>

Love should be our ultimate motive. The uniqueness of the gospel does not cut off the people if we present Christ with humility. The pivotal question then is this: how

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<sup>12</sup> Ajith Fernando, *The Christian's Attitude Toward World Religions* (Mumbai: GLS, 1988), 93.

<sup>13</sup> Herbert Hoefer, "Why are Christians Persecuted in India? Roots, Reasons, Responses," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 18:1, (Spring 2001): 12.

<sup>14</sup> Fernando, *The Christian's Attitude*, 46.

do we present the uniqueness of Christ without hurting people from other faiths? The Bible tells us that there is no other hope outside the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If this message is to transcend cultural and religious barriers we have to present Christ with humility.

To swing to the other extreme, it must be noted, is just as dangerous. The fear of offending people often paralyzes us from sharing the Good News. Even greater a challenge is when the recipient of the gospel suffers from our personal issues or self-doubt. How then does the gospel make an impact on someone else's life? This is a reality and poses a significant challenge. This writer is always encouraged by people who acknowledge their own vulnerability and fear – it encourages to press on in the mission field.

Evangelism is not an easy task. And there is little about the process that is automatic, that evangelists can expect to happen naturally, without constant guidance and intervention, in an organic fashion. Many people stay away from evangelism because of this very fear of failure. Dwelling on failure often paralyzes us. Lots of barriers need to be overcome, and success may take time. Barna puts it this way: "By focusing on our failings, we miss out our potential."<sup>15</sup> The author talked about Christ to his mother more than seven years before she came to know the Lord.

Listening to others is essential. "Commitment to proclamation also includes a commitment to listen to others. An opportunity to witness may require us to listen rather than talk. When people describe their views we must give them full attention. We do not want to interrupt. We are servants, and it should not bother us if our acquaintance

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<sup>15</sup> George Barna, *Turning Vision into Action* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1996), 124.

dominates a conversation."<sup>16</sup> AK-47 model evangelism may work in some places but not others.

A "holier than thou" attitude hinders the proclamation of the gospel. A subconscious imperialism can creep into our attitude. With their money and power, some churches behave as almost as if they were modern imperialists. There is often a alluring but dangerous tendency to tell the poor countries in Asia and other parts of the world what to do and how to run their missionary work. Evangelicals tend to go round the world conducting leadership seminars on church planting when they have little experience. Newbigin puts it this way:

The Christian gospel has sometimes been made the tool of an imperialism, and of that we have to repent. But at its heart it is the denial of all imperialisms, for at its center there is the cross where all imperialisms are humbled and we are invited to find the center of human unity in the One who was made nothing so that all might be one. The very heart of the biblical vision for the unity of humankind is that its center is not an imperial power but the slain Lamb.<sup>17</sup>

If Christians believe that the Bible is true and experience the supernatural power of Jesus Christ, they must demonstrate it in their lives. "What is unique about the Bible is the story which it tells, with its climax in the story of the incarnation, ministry, death, and resurrection of the Son of God. If that story is true, then it is unique and also universal in its implications for all human history."<sup>18</sup> If this is true, every Christian must bear a heavy responsibility to convey the uniqueness of this message through the way they live their lives.

Most people do not recognize that "our battle is not against the flesh and blood, but against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the

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<sup>16</sup> Fernando, *Sharing the Truth*, 36.

<sup>17</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel*, 159.

<sup>18</sup> Newbigin, *The Gospel*, 97.

spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Eph 6:12). These are forces that threaten to undermine us not from without, but from within, destroying the credibility of the Christian message even before we attempt to deliver it by causing us to act in a patronizing manner. Mark Mittelberg puts it in a very poignant way:

A very real spiritual enemy, Satan, would rather keep us busy doing anything in the world other than building a contagious church. Satan knows all about our call to reach lost people. He understands that our efforts in this area are designed to expand God’s kingdom and diminish his, so he tries to keep us tangled up in sin and selfish preoccupations. In fact, the seemingly mild sin of self-centeredness is, in my opinion, Satan’s greatest weapon against evangelism.<sup>19</sup>

Evangelism is not all about methods. Methods are secondary to the learning from the Master. Living in a world full of techniques and shortcuts, we are told to “work smarter”. However, in presenting the gospel, the presenters are totally dependent upon God’s wisdom, strength and guidance. “Evangelism centers in a Personality—Jesus Christ. He is the message and the medium. The Gospel mandate and its reproduction is wedded to His life. Obviously then, any person who learn of Him will become evangelistic, just as the discipleship out of which it grows will be developed.”<sup>20</sup> Our presentation of the gospel should be simple and appropriate. “More than fifty parables of Jesus are recorded in the Gospels. Simple enough for a child, yet deep enough for the advanced sage, they present spiritual truth in pictures of human life.”<sup>21</sup>

Evangelism is not just a task. It is dealing with people and getting into peoples’ lives. Evangelism cannot be rushed. “God is not a task-oriented ruler. He created people. He loves people. He sent His Son to die for the sins of people. He designed the church

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<sup>19</sup> Mark Mittelberg, *Building A Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View and Do Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 27.

<sup>20</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *Mind of the Master* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1977), 119.

<sup>21</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *The Master’s Way of Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1977), 70.

as a means for people to love others and to love Him. God is the ultimate people-Person."<sup>22</sup>

Pippert<sup>23</sup> extensively explained the importance of (1) cultivating the soil, (2) planting the seed and (3) reaping the harvest. The author personally believes it is very important to understand the holistic approach of the gospel. It is more than just a two-minute presentation. Yes, of course God can always put our naïveté or foolhardiness to good use, but diligent preparation is a necessity. In India, where many people are unaware of Christianity, spreading the gospel is therefore a task that will take some time.

In this part of the world many are willing on some level to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior but are not doing it. The real issue is not the message of the gospel. In H.L. Richard's words, "Conversion to Christianity is not viewed by Hindus as a change of spirituality or theology, but as a change of culture and civilization. It is the abandonment of the ways of the Hindu family in favor of foreign ways."<sup>24</sup> We who reach out to Hindus need to encourage new converts to stay with their own family. Once the new converts leave their family, it is hard to evangelize the rest of the family members. The acceptance of Christ by a community lies in the life of the converts.<sup>25</sup>

Prayer plays a vital role in winning the soul. "It is in the closet of intercession where the victory is won. Any activity not issuing from this discipline is an exercise in futility. Better to master this lesson in the school of Christ than to achieve excellence in

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<sup>22</sup> Barna, *The Power of Vision*, 102.

<sup>23</sup> Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Out of Saltshaker into the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1979).

<sup>24</sup> H.L. Richard, "Good News for Hindus in the Neighborhood," special issue, *Rethinking Hindu Ministry II: Papers from the Rethinking Forum*. (info@rethinkingforum.com, n.d.) 33.

<sup>25</sup> Extraction evangelism is not suitable for the work among Hindus. This issue will be discussed in Chapter four and five.

all the arts of persuasion. The eloquent speaker may influence men, but only a man of prayer can influence God."<sup>26</sup> Evangelism and prayer go hand in hand. Where there is no prayer, evangelism just becomes a routine religious ritual, action done for its own sake. "Prayer is talking to God about people, and evangelism is talking to people about God. We cannot do one without the other."<sup>27</sup>

The common thread of repentance and spending time in prayer in every revival is obvious. When God's people spend time in prayer and realize their own sin, God brings revival among them. Coleman gives the simple definition of revival: "Revival means to wake up and live."<sup>28</sup> Revival is, for the most part, man's responsibility—looking inward, realizing one's own purpose and turning to God for its ultimate fulfillment. It is an interesting thought for me to digest when Coleman says that "from the standpoint of New Testament Christianity there is nothing unusual about the revival experience"<sup>29</sup>. If Christians live their life according to Scripture there is no need to wait for revival. Revival starts with prayer.

Revival is not something that has happened only in some places with the help of others. Revival can happen within the group with almost no help from outsiders. When Everett A. Wilson talks about Revival and Revolution in Latin America, he says that "existing data indicate quite clearly that the groups that have experienced the largest,

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<sup>26</sup> Coleman, *Mind of the Master*, 50.

<sup>27</sup> Nick Pollard, *Evangelism Made Slightly Less Difficult* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 15.

<sup>28</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *The Coming World Revival* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1995), 19.

<sup>29</sup> Coleman, *The Coming World Revival*, 21.



most impressive growth are those that have received the least assistance from the North American sending agencies."<sup>30</sup>

### **The Current Situation**

In the past, only Christians are heard preaching the good news. Nowadays, every imaginable group is in university campuses and shopping centers proclaiming their own version of the good news. Evangelism is getting more and more difficult.

"Evangelism is not easy, particularly in today's culture, and if we are serious about reaching people with the gospel we must be serious about applying the brains God has given us to difficult, complex issues."<sup>31</sup>

The constant changes in society influence everyone. "People don't think the way they used to think, believe the things they used to believe, or value the things they used to value."<sup>32</sup> Skepticism is the hallmark of this generation. Our job is to present the gospel without compromise and address the skepticism. Some of our evangelism methods are irrelevant to many people. It is not the message that is irrelevant but the way the message is delivered. Experienced-based postmodern culture needs a different approach.

Here is a classic example of the presentation of the "Four Spiritual Laws"<sup>33</sup> from the Buddhist perspective:

1. The Buddha lives
2. The Buddha can help you!

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<sup>30</sup> Edith L. Blumhofer and Randall Balmer, *Modern Christian Revivals* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 186.

<sup>31</sup> Pollard, *Evangelism Made Slightly Less*, 18.

<sup>32</sup> Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church*, 42.

<sup>33</sup> Written by Campus Crusade for Christ founder Dr Bill Bright.

3. Buddhist prayer works!
4. You are already saved<sup>34</sup>

The sin-soaked world rejects anything that claims it is true. Wrong becomes right and absolutes are replaced with subjective morality. "The mad merry-go-round of sensuality is filled with millions awaiting their turn for initiation into iniquity. When wrong is so sweet a morsel, the sin-soaked, sex-slain youth could not care less about doing right. One crowded hour of glorious 'life'—so they argue—is worth a gamble on the speculation of the theologians' so-called 'eternity'." <sup>35</sup>

### Challenge

From a broader perspective, the author can see two challenges evangelicals face. Firstly, when non-Christians look at us, do they perceive us as trustworthy friends or simply religious people who bring people into the church with a selfish motive? Secondly, how is the gospel going to be presented in a society where absolutes do not exist? Under this second broad question, more specific, pointed questions can be asked: how should the gospel – the uniqueness of Christ among other gods be presented? Then the question of how Christ's absolute statements can be presented in a logical way also arises. These challenges are vast. Indian secular writer Khushwant Singh commented that "many Christians continued to bear high-sounding English names, their women wore a comical mixture of European and Indian dress; their hymns translated into Indian languages and sung to outlandish tunes to the accompaniment of harmoniums, cymbals and drums, evoked more derision than reverence." <sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Fernando, *Sharing the Truth*, 146.

<sup>35</sup> Leonard Ravenhill, *Why Revival Tarries* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1959), 92.

<sup>36</sup> Khushwant Singh, *India: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Delhi: Vision Books, 1988), 76.

This fundamental question should also be asked: Are evangelists relevant to society? One of the prime qualifications of a minister is his living a pure and holy life.

Ajith Fernando expresses it very clearly:

I fear that the behavior of the present generation of Christian leaders is such that we are going to give the next generation a very poor example of godliness. If we do not arrest this trend, we could be responsible for an outbreak of cynicism in the younger generation, where doctrines are not honored anymore because the leaders of the earlier generation did not adorn the doctrine with holy lives (Tit.2:10).<sup>37</sup>

In a world where everybody wants to be independent, the accountability of Christian workers is very important. If we are called to be a minister, there is no such a thing as an independent ministry. "If we are to be followers of Jesus, his values must permeate our values. We need to be concerned more with how our lives reflect his love, his holiness and obedience than with the latest witnessing techniques. When we live as Jesus did, in his power and with his presence, seekers will be drawn to us".<sup>38</sup>

Not all books the author read specifically mentioned the subject of holiness but he can see the underlining theme of personal holiness in every book, and the underpinning role it plays in evangelism. "Holiness is not a series of do's and don'ts, but conformity to the character of God and obedience to the will of God. Accepting with contentment whatever circumstances God allows for me is very much a part of a holy life."<sup>39</sup> "God's nature demands holiness in the life of a Christian. When He calls us to salvation, He calls us to fellowship with Himself and His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3).

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<sup>37</sup> Ajith Fernando, *Jesus Driven Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway Press, 2002) 36.

<sup>38</sup> Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker*, 93.

<sup>39</sup> Jerry Bridge, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 68-69.

But God is light; in Him no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). How then can we have fellowship with Him if we continue to walk in darkness?"<sup>40</sup>

### **Discipleship**

Practical applications are necessary to build up new believers. Helping them to overcome obstacles involved in becoming a disciple, praying with them, inviting them to our home where he or she can see how a Christian family live—such actions can go a long way in the life of a new believer. Discipleship is a long process. Commitment and determination are indispensable.

Hospitality and fellowship play very important roles in a new believer's life. George Hunter clearly demonstrates this in his book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*. People need to be welcomed in the community without any strings attached whatsoever. This is very important for those who are from non-Christian backgrounds. In his words, "belonging comes before believing."<sup>41</sup> Most of the HBBs in Malabar come to know the Lord through small group evangelism or a very close fellowship with someone they can trust.<sup>42</sup>

Discipleship can be costly and it has always in some ways been a radical idea. It is not a popular topic for discussion in the Christian arena. We hear more about "leadership" than "discipleship". "Making disciples takes time. It cannot be done through

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<sup>40</sup> Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*, 35.

<sup>41</sup> George Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 54.

<sup>42</sup> During the author's interviews with HBB, forty-five out of seventy responded that they came to know the Lord through either of the two ways mentioned. More will be discussed in Chapter Four.

a series of lectures and a training seminar in the church, nor can it be done by reading a book. It cannot be rushed."<sup>43</sup>

Young believers need to be taught that discipleship is a crucial part of their Christian maturity. "Discipleship is our opportunity to tap the infinite resources of God. It is our chance to give our lives to significance rather than mediocrity. In discipleship we are not doing God a favor. He is doing us a favor. It is vital that the disciple grasp this important concept."<sup>44</sup> Discipleship can be distilled into a question of godly obedience, of subjugating individual want to the will of God. As Coleman explains,

Unwittingly, I am afraid, Christian discipleship has often been squeezed into this world's mold, so that prosperity and success are more cherished than radical obedience. But it will not stand the test of time. When the standards of church membership are set by popular demand, eventually the church becomes so much like the world that there is no reason for the world to change.<sup>45</sup>

When Jesus said, "Follow me", he did not focus on the intellectual or social status of the disciple. He asked for their commitment. "A disciple can be forgiven if he does not have great mental ability. He can be forgiven also if he does not display outstanding physical prowess. But no disciple can be excused if he does not have zeal. If his heart is not aflame with a red-hot passion for the Saviour, he stands condemned."<sup>46</sup> Discipleship is a core of becoming a Christian whose foundations it will be perilous to ignore.

Bill Hull mentioned that baptism should be a bold and public proclamation for a disciple. "Baptism means going public as a disciple. It was never meant to be a private

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<sup>43</sup> Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 107.

<sup>44</sup> Walter Hendrickson, *Disciples Are Made Not Born* (Singapore: The Navigators, 1992), 31.

<sup>45</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1998), 98.

<sup>46</sup> William MacDonald, *True Discipleship* (Bromley: STL Books, 1974), 31.

ritual that takes place inside church walls."<sup>47</sup> In the Indian context, more discernment is necessary. In a different cultural context, discourses of symbolic meaning are often radically reinterpreted and modified to take on meanings very far from what the actions might have meant at their point of origin. In Malabar, baptism is interpreted as an outward symbol of a conversion to the Christian religion and of betrayal to loved ones. Public baptism attracts lots of unwanted attention. For a new believer, it means excommunication from the family and community, and may even result in severe persecution. "Baptism is viewed as an allegiance to a group and an organization allied with the West."<sup>48</sup>

Training new believers is of particular importance in the Malabar context. Most of the new believers are from a Hindu background and their understanding of Christianity is very different from ours. They have never gone through Sunday school or ever stepped into a church. The Bible is a foreign book to many. It is therefore not surprising that training of HBBs is pivotal. By the end of any training, HBBs should:

1. Major in principles rather than methods.
2. Major in meeting needs of people rather than on developing and imparting techniques.
3. Major in developing the thought processes rather than the skills.
4. Major in how to trust rather than teaching theories about God.<sup>49</sup>

Generally, more people are attracted towards leadership training than discipleship training. The author went through many years seminary education but did not come across any "discipleship" on the curriculum except during his years with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. When talking about Singapore seminaries, Keith

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<sup>47</sup> Bill Hull. *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 29.

<sup>48</sup> Hoefer, *Why are Christians*, 11.

<sup>49</sup> Hendrickson, *Disciples Are Made Not Born*, 123.

Hinton says: "Seminary students are trained to do things churches do, but they are not taught to strategize, to dream dreams, much less to contemplate a philosophy of ministry."<sup>50</sup> Aubrey Malphurs further highlights the failings of such a system: "the Seminary taught me Greek, Hebrew, and theology, but no one taught me how to make disciples which is the very heart of ministry."<sup>51</sup> Perhaps seminaries need to relook at their curriculum. There are not many conferences on discipleship but many on leadership. It looks like everybody wants to be a leader, but there are not many takers for the all-too-important role of servanthood.

Spiritual leadership is key to training these new believers. "Spiritual leadership is not an occupation: It is a calling."<sup>52</sup> Spiritual leadership is all about influence. It is nothing more, nothing less. "Spiritual leadership is moving people on to God's agenda"<sup>53</sup>

Leadership conferences are a norm in Singapore. There is a profusion of models and methods from which one can pick and choose. But Jesus established a perfect model for all. "Jesus has established the model for Christian leaders. It is not found in his "methodology." Rather, it is seen in his absolute obedience to the Father's will."<sup>54</sup> In the area of duplicating successful methods, leaders should be discerning. There is a great tendency among the Christian organizations and churches to copy the success methods that led to past successes without reevaluating them when used in different contexts.

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<sup>50</sup> Keith Hinton, *Growing Churches: Singapore Style* (Singapore: Overseas Missionary Fellowship Books, 1985), 163.

<sup>51</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategy 2000: Churches Making Disciples for the Next Millennium* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000), 26.

<sup>52</sup> Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership* (Nashville: Broadman, 2001), xi

<sup>53</sup> Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 20.

<sup>54</sup> Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 28.

Christian organizations should take note that, throughout Scripture, God rarely worked in the same way twice. God's activity was always unique to the people with whom he was dealing and in the time in which he was working. God's activity cannot be reduced to a formula because God is always more concerned with peoples' obedient response to his will than with the means of communicating his will.<sup>55</sup>

Spiritual leaders are great disciple makers. For them, it is a great joy to see a young believer come into the church or fellowship group and eventually mature into a church leader. Insecure leaders do not develop others, while good spiritual leaders are incessantly looking for people he or she can develop. "Developing leaders must be a core value of any leader. Unless leaders are intentional about developing leaders within their organization, it will not happen."<sup>56</sup>

A good leader seeks to improve himself to improve others. "Good leaders never stop learning. They seek the company of wise people. They read books and articles that stretch their thinking. They read the biographies of great leaders and thinkers. They don't simply read the popular, predigested books that flood the market. They find authors who challenge their presuppositions and who bring fresh insights to their field."<sup>57</sup>

### **People Matter**

People are important to God. When Jesus saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion (Matt 9:36). He saw them as a sheep without a shepherd. When Bill Hybels talks about Luke 15, he says:

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<sup>55</sup> Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 59.

<sup>56</sup> Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 36.

<sup>57</sup> Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 244.



There are some common threads that run through these stories in Luke 15. The first is that in each one, *something of great value was missing*, something that really mattered. The missing sheep was very important to the shepherd. It represented a significant part of his livelihood. The lost coin was vital to the woman's survival. Quite possibly she was a widow, and what was at stake was a tenth of her entire estate. And, it goes without saying, the wayward son mattered greatly to his father.<sup>58</sup>

Hybels constantly emphasizes that "Jesus' stories in Luke 15 tell us that *you have never looked eyes with another human being who isn't valuable to God*. When this fact grips you to the core of your being, you'll never be the same. You will live in awe of the scope and depth and breadth of God's love, and you'll treat people differently."<sup>59</sup> His simple formula is "HP + CP + CC = MI"; in other words, High Potency + Close Proximity + Clear Communication = Maximum Impact. These thoughts come from a pastor's heart which is committed to irreligious people for the sake of Christ. "Christians are to *be* good news before they share the good news."<sup>60</sup> Before the gospel is presented to a person, genuine concern and caring without any selfish motive need to take place. "Jesus does not leave His message to words. Reaching out His big hands, He takes the children in His arms and blesses them."<sup>61</sup>

Authentic identity, authentic emotional life, and authentic confession<sup>62</sup> are real issues in the Christian world. Most Christians are good in presenting themselves as problem free, and pretending that everything is working well. But in reality, they face the same problems as non-Christians face. Hybels asks us to identify with people, to use common experiences and challenges as a bridge across a religious gulf.

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<sup>58</sup> Mark Mettelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 22.

<sup>59</sup> Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, 27.

<sup>60</sup> Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, 69.

<sup>61</sup> Robert E. Coleman, *The Master's Way of Personal Evangelism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1977), 105.

<sup>62</sup> Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Christian*, 75, 79.

In a sense, he offers a practical and commonsensical answer to the problem of cultural indifference that McGavran highlights by pointing to the unity of human experience in confronting universal problems that all individuals face. Hybels' message also dovetails with Barna's conception that God is inextricably concerned with people, and by extension, the problems they face. Barna points out that God never forgets the centrality of individual experiences and concerns within his ministry, and Hybels suggests that these individual struggles provide the very platform upon which common ground for sharing the gospel can be established.

One striking but simple thought Hybels brought out was the necessity of mingling with irreligious people. Evangelism is accomplished through individuals; committees and infrastructure only help to facilitate. Coleman puts it this way: "Evangelism cannot be legislated by church committees or worked up by church committees or worked by highly organized crusades, however well intentioned they may be. Human effort apart from the Holy Spirit is utterly futile. Only to the degree that we allow the Spirit to exalt Christ in and through us can our labors bring forth any fruit."<sup>63</sup>

Jesus never condemned anyone because of their genuine ignorance. He presented eternal life with utmost respect for the person. Jesus gently reminded Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin, of his spiritual ignorance. Evangelism necessitates getting involved in people's lives on a personal and intimate level. "Evangelism involves taking people seriously, getting across to their island of concerns and needs, and then sharing Christ as lord in the context of our natural living situations."<sup>64</sup> Pippert's statement closely reflects the thoughts of Hunter, who points out

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<sup>63</sup> Coleman, *The Master's Way of Personal Evangelism*, 12.

<sup>64</sup> Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker*, 28.

that this empathetic understanding must take place within a mindset that is willing to respect cultural divergences. Many times "AK-47 style" evangelism is undertaken using continuous volley of words without ensuring that others are listening. Sometimes our goal is just to deliver the message, irrespective of how it is received.

Richard Peace's *Small Group Evangelism* is an excellent resource book for evangelism. Even though this book results from his campus ministry experience, the principles are transferable to the Malabar context. He addressed some of the basic reality experienced by Christians in the sharing of the gospel. The first part of the book talks about the concept of small group evangelism which include key issues like the principles of evangelism, overcoming doubts and fear, understanding group dynamics, the process of planning, the strategy of small group evangelism, etc. Each chapter ends with practical questions for discussion. The second part provides materials for a program of eight training sessions to guide training groups in conducting small group outreach. The third part, a Leader's Guide, provides the resources the group leader needs to prepare for the small group training sessions.

The author is thinking of using some of the principles from the book for the HBB Care Groups in Malabar, alongside Coleman's book, *The Master's Way of Personal Evangelism*.

In the Malabar context, evangelism within a small group is very relevant. Four reasons why Small Groups are significant:<sup>65</sup>

1. A group provides the continuing exposure to Christianity so vital to spiritual discovery.
2. Groups are familiar to all of us since we spend hours in informal groups discussing everything under the sun, a group is a natural way of exposing people to Christianity.
3. Small groups provide opportunity for face-to-face interaction.

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<sup>65</sup> Richard Peace, *Small Group Evangelism: A Training Program For Reaching Out With The Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1985), 67-68.

4. Small groups work because they meet a fundamental need within each of us, the need for fellowship.

As our discussion of the authors above has shown, people are important to God and people are His method. He uses us to proclaim His eternal message. So, it is our responsibility to produce the next generation of people with the passion to go out and present the gospel. The Biblical foundations for such a generational nurturing are fairly clear.

The letters of Paul reflected a personal concern for these growing leaders. Some sixty or more persons are mentioned by name in the Epistles. They are referred to as "friends," "partners," "fellow workers," "teammates," "faithful helpers," those who labored "side by side" with him. Obviously he had developed very close relationship with many of the brethren.<sup>66</sup>

### **Vision**

One key concern is that not much evangelistic activity is happening in Malabar because of a lack of coordination and clear vision. Vision is an important part of any ministry. Proverbs 29:18 says: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Despite many years of seminary education, the author has yet to come across the term "vision" in that seminary curriculum, even though the Bible is filled with visionary heroes. George Barna portrays the importance of vision well in his book, *The Power of Vision*. Every ministry begins with vision. He puts it very plainly and in a straightforward manner:

Realize that true ministry begins with vision. For a Christian leader-that is, an individual chosen by God to move His people forward-vision is not to be regarded as an option. It is the insight that instructs the leader and directs his or her path. If, for whatever reason, you are attempting to lead God's people without God's vision for your ministry, you are simply playing a dangerous game. It is game that neither pleases God nor satisfies people.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 61.

<sup>67</sup> Barna, *The Power of Vision*, 16.

Barna brings out several examples from the Bible - Paul, David, Moses and a number of great people from history, from Martin Luther to Donald McGavran. God gave different visions to different people. God gave a vision to Bill Hybels to reach "Unchurched Harry and Unchurched Mary."<sup>68</sup> Vision plays a very important part in the development of a ministry. Barna puts it this way: "Vision for ministry is a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants and is based upon an accurate understanding of God, self and circumstances."<sup>69</sup>

Most people are confused regarding mission statements and vision statements. "Vision is specific, detailed, customized, distinctive and unique to a given church."<sup>70</sup> But a mission statement is a broad, general statement about who you wish to teach and what the church hopes to accomplish. The mission statement is philosophic in nature, the vision statement is strategic in character.<sup>71</sup> "Mission precedes vision, but without vision, it is empty and incomplete."<sup>72</sup> If our vision is clear for a ministry, it will navigate us without much distraction.

It is vital to encourage congregations to be involved in evangelism and a collective vision. It should not be only a once-a-year program. Church leaders need to take up the responsibility of vision casting. Only visionary leaders can impact their congregations. The author works in a traditional church whose history can be traced back sixty years. Barna says: "Tradition is generally a reflection of the past. Vision is

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<sup>68</sup> Barna, *The Power of Vision*, 23.

<sup>69</sup> Barna, *The Power of Vision*, 28.

<sup>70</sup> Barna, *The Power of Vision*, 39.

<sup>71</sup> Barna, *The Power of Vision*, 39.

<sup>72</sup> Barna, *The Power of Vision*, 46.

always a reflection of the future"<sup>73</sup> Always looking back to our old days and learning from our mistakes is great but our vision should unhesitatingly propel us forward.

"Vision has no force, power or impact unless it spreads from the visionary to the visionless."<sup>74</sup> Those who have a vision see things differently from everyone else. So, it is vitally important for a Christian leader to impart his vision to the visionless. This vision must be one that inspires people to action; there is little purpose to the vision otherwise"<sup>75</sup>. As a guiding force in evangelism, visionaries must be willing to pay a very high price for their work. The apostle Paul's life was not an easy one.

The author comes from a culture where an evangelist is one who has no fixed schedule or vision for the ministry. He has witnessed laidback evangelists giving the excuse, "Along the way, I may talk to people" and he is not sure this is the way God wants evangelists to pursue their work. "Marketing without cultivating and clarifying your vision is a near-certain prescription for failure."<sup>76</sup>

*Building a Contagious Church* is an excellent book. The author speaks from his own experience, and he claims that his methods are proven. "This book presents proven approaches and transferable principles for raising the evangelistic temperature in yourself and in your entire church."<sup>77</sup> Incarnational evangelism, which the book highlights, is a very important aspect of evangelism. Many people in history adopted incarnational evangelism. James Hudson Taylor, for instance, gave up his business suit

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<sup>73</sup> Barna, *The Power of Vision*, 122.

<sup>74</sup> Barna, *The Power of Vision*, 52.

<sup>75</sup> Barna, *The Power of Vision*, 98.

<sup>76</sup> Barna, *The Power of Vision*, 77.

<sup>77</sup> Mittelberg, *Building a Contagious Church*, 14.

and put on a ponytail to reach the millions in China. However, people misunderstood him.

### **The Church**

Archbishop William Temple described the church as "the only society in the world which exists for the benefit of those who are not its members."<sup>78</sup> But over the years, the church has become an exclusive club with memberships and privileges. It has become a religious symbol rather than a beacon of light. Leonard Sweet raises a pertinent question here: "Is the church itself the problem, with structures not conducive to ministry and mission in this new world, or is the church failing to be the church, less true to itself than true to its time?"<sup>79</sup>

What the notion of "the church" exactly means to a HBB in the Malabar context is a very complex question. Most of the HBBs have never been to any church. Most of them will not recognize many of the existing denominations and the factors which distinguish them. "Swami Abhedananda has said, 'A Hindu distinguishes the religion of the churches from the religion of Jesus the Christ. The religion which is popularly known as Christianity should be called "Churchianity" in contradiction to that pure religion of the heart which is taught by Jesus and practiced by his disciples.'"<sup>80</sup>

Their understanding of church is essentially premised on the nature of the first Christian fellowship they come into contact with. "Asian followers of Christ who are not church members come into two categories: those who would like to join a church but

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<sup>78</sup> Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 2003), 13.

<sup>79</sup> Leonard Sweet, ed., *Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 21.

<sup>80</sup> Ram Gidoomal and Mike Fearon, *Karma 'N' Chips: The New Age of Asian Spirituality* (London: Wimbledon Publishing Company, 1994), 146.

are fearful of ostracism from family and friends, and those who simply find institutionalised Christianity unattractive and have no wish to be part of it.”<sup>81</sup>

Most of the HBBs are in independent charismatic churches or Brethren churches. Their primary theology is therefore learned through the course of and within the context of this fellowship. Most of the HBBs will always remain in small fellowships, and their understanding of the church will be that of the small fellowship.

Some Hindus recognize the divinity of Jesus but reject the church as a product of colonialism. They want to identify with their families, friends, communities and culture. Herbert Hoefler, author of *Churchless Christianity*<sup>82</sup> and former staff of Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute found through a random sampling that 200,000 people in the city of Chennai identified themselves as “non-baptized believers in Christ” (NBBCs) but intentionally chose to remain separate from any church.<sup>83</sup>

In India these people are known as Jesu bhakta, which means “followers of Christ.” Hoefler narrates a fascinating story of a Jesu bhakta who advocates these three principles as he meets his fellow believers around the country:

1. If anybody asks, tell them you’re a Hindu (understood culturally in this case).
2. Never go to church (they will come after you right to your home, embarrassing you and family).
3. Do not go into full-time religious work (stay within one’s family and carry out one’s social responsibilities as a witness there).<sup>84</sup>

The primary responsibility of church is to make disciples. But somewhere along the line church lost sight of the purpose of her own existence. “The statistics on

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<sup>81</sup> Gidoomal, *Karma*, 146.

<sup>82</sup> Herbert E. Hoefler, *Churchless Christianity* (Madras: Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, 1991).

<sup>83</sup> Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rhee and Douglas McConnell, ed., *The Changing Face of World Missions: Engaging Contemporary Issues and Trends* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 95.

<sup>84</sup> Hoefler, *Why are Christians*, 11.



evangelism and discipleship indicate that the church is not making disciples."<sup>85</sup> The Church should be relevant to the society. It is supposed to be a beacon of light for the lost world. Somewhere along the way, some churches have lost that light. Leonard Ravenhill said, "I do marvel at the Lord's patience with the sleepy, sluggish, selfish Church! A prodigal Church in prodigal world is God's real problem."<sup>86</sup> William MacDonald put it more bluntly: "The disgrace of the church in the twentieth century is that more zeal is evident among Communists and cultists than among Christians."<sup>87</sup> Christians must be relevant to the people whom they minister to. Every generation needs a message that fits into their understanding.

The church is a community and the home is a perfect place for nurturing community. Church communities in homes should be regarded with this mindset: "A new wineskin is emerging; let's not resist it. It may change the look of church as we know it, but let's open our hearts to that the new and the old can work together. Let's release the emerging churches and allow them to find their places in the transformation of our families, our cities and our nations!"<sup>88</sup> It is by allowing the contextualization of fellowship and the assimilative adaption of formal church structures that HBBs can be reached. Christians cannot be strangers to this sort of change:

When Jesus came, He turned everything on its head. He made *everyone* who believed in Him a servant-leader: tax collectors, fishermen, political terrorist, Roman officers, and men and women alike. Everyone was invited to be a part of the Church. This new way of doing things was called the *ecclesia*-a term familiar to the people of the day.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Mittelberg, *Becoming a Contagious Church*, 22.

<sup>86</sup> Ravenhill, *Why Revival Tarries*, 101.

<sup>87</sup> William MacDonald, *True Discipleship*, (Bromley: STL Books, 1974), 34.

<sup>88</sup> Larry Kreider and Floyd McClung, *Starting a House Church* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2007), 15.

<sup>89</sup> Kreider, *Starting a House Church*, 60.

The best way to reach the Hindu community is to start small house-groups among them. House churches can reproduce more rapidly than established denominational churches as bureaucracy in these churches can quickly stifle any enthusiasm. The home is a neutral place where HBBs can meet freely as there is no obvious evidence of a Christian gathering. This church is one akin to the church in the Book of Acts.

The current generation is not looking for the perfect model of a church. They are looking instead for a place where they can find genuine acceptance. The concept of discipleship needs to change. At the moment most of the church programs basically ask believers to come to church on certain days to go through a discipleship program. It is time the discipleship program is taken out of the church and conducted among the un-churched people.

One of the author's concerns for his church is that most of his church ministries are compartmentalized and the different ministries do not communicate with one another. There is no deliberate strategic coordinating effort to integrate the various ministries. In reality, outreach should be part of the overall strategy in all ministries. Compartmentalized ministry does not help the church to prioritize evangelism. Until and unless evangelism and discipleship becomes the center of the church's focus, nothing is going to happen.

Small Group evangelism should be the center of every church's evangelistic efforts. In its relaxed atmosphere, people will be more open to the gospel. Un-churched people will feel more comfortable in small groups. Genuine friendship always brings back people to fellowship. Ordinary people in small groups can make a big difference. Bruce Larson wrote: "The world today is not impressed by the Bible, or by the Church, or by

preaching. And we cannot confront a needy world with God's love primarily by these means. The climate of our time is one in which people listen most readily to laymen with whom they can identify."<sup>90</sup>

The constant danger Christians face is to forget that to become part of the Church means entering a life of suffering for God. Regarding church growth, Coleman has this to say: "Strangely, today we hear little about self-denial and suffering in all the talk about church growth. Is this because most of what has been said to date has come out of the Western world, where affluence abounds and church affiliation is a mark of social acceptance, if not good politics?"<sup>91</sup>

John Piper suggests six reasons why God appoints suffering for His servants:

1. Suffering deepens faith and holiness
2. Suffering makes your cup increase
3. Suffering is the price of making others bold
4. Suffering fills up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions
5. Suffering enforces the missionary command to go
6. Supremacy of Christ is manifest in suffering<sup>92</sup>

## Conclusion

Christians do not have all the necessary tools and resources. Our methods may not be perfect. But He has chosen us to proclaim his glorious good news.

The weapons of the Christian warfare seem ridiculous to the man of the world. The plan that proved effective against Jericho would be ridiculed by military leaders today. Gideon's insignificant army would evoke only ridicule. And what shall we say of David's slingshot, of Shamgar's ox-goad, and of God's paltry army of fools down through the centuries? The spiritual mind knows that God is not on

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<sup>90</sup> Richard Peace, *Small Group Evangelism: A Training Program For Reaching Out With The Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1985), 84.

<sup>91</sup> Coleman, *The Master Plan*, 98.

<sup>92</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 86-98.

the side of the biggest battalions, but rather that He loves to take the weak and poor and despised things of this world and glorify Himself through them.<sup>93</sup>

The good Christian must acknowledge that there is no space for him to give himself platitudinous excuses for not doing his best to bring people to God, and not prepare for the all-encompassing task of evangelism.

Regarding the Great Commission:

The Great Commission was given to every Christian, not just to the first disciples. When Jesus declared that His disciples are commissioned to go into the world on mission for Him, He did not say that they could vote on whether or not it is a good idea! We, as Jesus' disciples, are sent people. God has one goal: that His own glory would fill the Earth. And God has designed one way to accomplish His goal: through those who know, love and obey His son, Jesus.<sup>94</sup>

The author finds it difficult to resist using the following quotes which so perfectly capture God's calling on our lives and His providence to do His will.

Half-hearted, lukewarm commitment can never be condoned in the ranks of God's army. We are engaged in mortal combat with all the principalities of darkness, and the battle will grow more intense as the end of the age approaches. Nothing less than total allegiance to our Commander in Chief qualifies soldiers for battle. Christ's call is to martyrdom-to die to our own self-appointed ways, in loving submission to the will of God. His word is our command, His cross the measure of our obedience. Such consecration may be looked upon as fanaticism by the worldly-wise, but it is the stuff the New Testament church is made of: daring faith that does not think of limits or make excuses; a willingness to go wherever Christ leads, never to stop until His work is finished and the commendation is heard, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."<sup>95</sup>

To that, the author has only this to add: Amen.

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<sup>93</sup> MacDonald, *True Discipleship*, 51.

<sup>94</sup> Larry Kreider and Floyd McClung, *Starting a House Church* (Ventura: Regal Books, 2007), 29.

<sup>95</sup> Coleman, *The Master Plan*, 131.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT DESIGN

This chapter will introduce the thesis project in its context, which is Malabar in north Kerala. It chapter will also provide the purpose, methodology and the limitations of this thesis project.

#### **Understanding the Geopolitical Context**

Kerala is usually portrayed as a Christian state where there is no need for evangelization.<sup>1</sup> While this may be true in South Kerala, North Kerala (Malabar) is very much dominated by Hindus. At the present, intentional evangelism among Hindus in Malabar is not being actively carried out, and significantly, traditional Christianity has yet to make any impact among Hindu communities.

Syrian Christians, with links to the Syrian Jacobite Church, are descendants of those traditionally believed to have been evangelized by the apostle Thomas. They form the majority of Kerala's Christians and are members of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant denominations. They have high social, political and economic status but have become little more than a caste within Hindu society...<sup>2</sup>

Malabar is known for her political influence all over Kerala. It is the nurturing ground of the Communist movement in Kerala, and was home to famous communist leaders such as A.K. Gopalan, Azhikodan Raghavan and E. K. Nayanar, former Chief Minister of Kerala. K.Karunakaran,<sup>3</sup> a former Chief Minister, also comes from Malabar.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a false perception that Kerala is a Christian state. In fact there are more Muslims in Kerala than Christians. There are 24.7% Muslims in Kerala compare to 19.0% Christians. Hindu population still remains the highest 56.2%. This 19.0% Christians includes all types of denominations, Jehovah Witness, Mormons and Catholics. Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Colorado Springs: Biblica Publishing, 2010), 430.

<sup>2</sup> Jason Mandryk, *Operation World*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Colorado Springs: Biblica Publishing, 2010), 430.

<sup>3</sup> These are some of the well-known political leaders from Malabar. Most of them belong to Communist (Marxist) Party.

Unsurprisingly, communist parties have a strong base in Malabar and the present<sup>4</sup> Kerala government is the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)). However, it is important to note that these communists are very different from those in China or Vietnam; being usually receptive to religion: "The state (Kerala) government is led by Marxists, who have no hesitation in proclaiming picturesque Kerala as "God's own country" in tourism brochures."<sup>5</sup>

Kerala became the first place in the world to elect a communist led government through ballot paper. Over the years communist party had a great influence in every strata of society. The table below shows that since the beginning of the formation of Kerala State, Communist played a major role in Kerala politics.

5 April 1957 to 31 July 1959	Communist Party of India (CPI)
6 March 1967 to 1 November 1969	Communist Party of India (Marxist) <sup>6</sup>
1 November 1969 to 1 August 1970	Communist Party of India (CPI)
4 October 1970 to 25 March 1977	Communist Party of India (CPI)
29 October 1978 to 7 October 1979	Communist Party of India (CPI)
25 January 1980 to 20 October 1981	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
26 March 1987 to 17 June 1991	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
20 May 1996 to 13 May 2001	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
18 May 2006 to <i>incumbent</i>	Communist Party of India (Marxist)

Figure 2. Communist Party in power in Kerala since 1959

Many places in Malabar are also notorious for political turmoil. Politically motivated murders are the norm in certain regions of Malabar. The Panoor, Koothparamba and Mattanur areas have been a hub of political violence resulting from

<sup>4</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> March 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Ravi Velloor, "Memo from Kerala: Fire God ritual offers glimpse of ancient India, Group of Keralans reviving age-old practices before they are lost to humanity," *The Straits Times*, January 31, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> The Communist Party of India (Marxist) is a political party in India. The party emerged out of a split from the Communist Party of India in 1964.

clashes between the CPI (M) and the BJP-led<sup>7</sup> Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Clashes in 2008 between the two groups left seven people killed and many injured.

### **Research Methodology**

To understand the methods and practices of evangelism among the Hindu community in Malabar, the author interviewed seventy HBBs. The questions in the interview questionnaire, attached as Appendix 1, are divided into four categories. He collated the feedback and visited Malabar again to meet up with some Malabar HBBs and pastors, discussing viable solutions for the problems with current attempts at the evangelization of Malabar.

The author interviewed only HBBs, whose concerns are primarily relevant to this thesis project. All of them were born and brought up in a Hindu religious family and it was only at a later stage of their life that they became Christian. Most of the HBBs were popular or secular Hindus; very few of them were religious Hindus. To verify that they were genuinely from a Hindu background, the author requested to know their names before interviewing them; in the context of Malabar, the name of surname of an individual provides useful information regarding their cultural and religious background. The author talked to seventy HBBs over the course of six months;<sup>8</sup> many conversations were carried out in an informal manner, and some took place in homes over a cup of tea or a meal.

The author also made several trips to Malabar to interview HBBs and talk to pastors and other Christian workers. Most of them were very cooperative and supportive toward the author's endeavors. The author also conducted a training program that

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<sup>7</sup> Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is a Hindu political party.

<sup>8</sup> January 2010 to June 2010

lasted ten days for HBBs. During these training sessions many different issues were brought up and discussed; many HBBs had similar questions or faced similar issues.

Even though the author had prepared a detailed questionnaire, he did not directly distribute them to HBBs to ask for their feedback and data. The key reason was that in that given culture, asking someone questions with a stack of papers in one hand immediately arouses suspicion that the person asking the questions has been paid by someone else to collect data as part of some sort of exploitative money-making enterprise funded by a western nation. Such suspicion, though unfounded, unfortunately causes people to become extremely reluctant to divulge any useful information.

Secondly, the physical act of filling in a questionnaire in front of them often distracts interviewees from the process of answering the questions as their attention shifts to trying to observe what the interviewer is writing; often the interviewee is trying to make sure that nothing negative about himself/herself is being written down. This can compromise the integrity of the interviewing process. Writing in English only arouses further suspicion of the interviewee. From the author's perspective, having to ask questions while filling up the questionnaire at the same time also distracts from the process of the interview. This meant that the author could not directly use the questionnaire when interviewing HBBs. What the author did was engage in hundreds of hours of dialogue with the HBBs of Malabar. After each lengthy dialogue session,<sup>9</sup> the author would fill up the questionnaire based on the information gained during the dialogue in the absence of the interviewee, a semi-structured interview based on field recollections.

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<sup>9</sup> One to three hours.



The author took extra care when talking to pastors and evangelists in Malabar not to cause any insult to them, as most of their efforts have at best yielded very limited success. Through conversation, the author had to carefully make them aware of the issues HBBs faced while respecting their efforts. To ensure that all parties could give honest answers, the author took care not to interview pastors or church leaders together with HBBs; this could prevent them from expressing their honest opinions.

The data utilized for this project are both empirical and narrative in nature, though overreliance on pure numerical analysis alone is minimized in favor of a more qualitative analysis of the challenges HBBs face and the problems that plague current attempts at evangelization, based on the data gathered. The thesis project mainly focuses on the methods and practices of evangelism among the Hindu community in Malabar, and the following limitations will be observed for the sake of clarity:

This project will not be discussing various Hindu philosophies that have evolved over the years and their implications for the Malabar community. It will also not focus on the details of an anthropological understanding of cultural practices among Hindus, even though the author is aware that social, cultural and anthropological issues are involved in understanding the people and their culture. However, the paper will occasionally employ such anthropological analysis. The author has consulted a number of books on anthropology in order to understand the cultural associations that exist within the Malabar Hindu community.<sup>10</sup> The conclusions of this thesis are based on the surveys and interviews conducted, questionnaire data and the experiences the author has gathered over his many years of training HBBs in Kerala.

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<sup>10</sup> Paul G. Hiebert's books on Cultural Anthropology were of great help. *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

## Data Sources

Primary sources were identified through field research and in the various libraries of theological colleges in Singapore and in India. There was no specific document found dealing with evangelizing Hindus in Malabar, indicating that there has probably not been much research done in this particular field of evangelism. However, there have been some studies done on Popular Hinduism in general.<sup>11</sup> In 1992, Roland E. Miller published a book on *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: A Study in Islamic Trends In Kerala*,<sup>12</sup> in which he discussed in detail the Mappila Muslims in Malabar.<sup>13</sup> There are also a number of excellent books talking about Hindu evangelism<sup>14</sup> in general; the author consulted several of these.

The churches in Malabar do not keep a record of how many HBBs they have in their churches or of past events in general, so the author had to gather his own information with regard to HBB issues using libraries, questionnaires and interviews. The cardinal aims of his research were threefold: First, to establish what Malabar Hindus think about Jesus Christ; second, to find out more about current evangelism methods and determine which is the most suitable for their community; and thirdly, to create recommendations for evangelists to let their HBB community integrate into the Christian community.

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<sup>11</sup> A.M.Abrahamm Ayrookuzhiel, *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism: An Empirical Study in Chirakkal, North Malabar* (Madras: The Christian Institute Society, 1983).

<sup>12</sup> First published in 1976.

<sup>13</sup> Roland E. Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala: A Study in Islamic Trends*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., (Madras: Orient Longman Ltd, 1992). Most of the Kerala Muslims, known as "Mappilas", live in Malabar and there are around nine million of them.

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Wardell & Ram Goodmal, *Chapatis for Tea: Reaching Your Hindu Neighbour: A Practical Guide* (Surrey: Highland Books, 1994). George David, *Communicating Christ Among Hindu Peoples* (Chennai: CBMTM Publications, 1998). Madasamy Thirumalai, *Sharing Your Faith With A Hindu* (Minnesota: Bethany House, 2002). Ram Gidoomal and Mike Fearon, *Karma 'n' Chips: The New Age of Asian Spirituality* (London: Wimbledon Publishing Company, 1994). This book is not talking about reaching Hindus but simplifies some of the most complex Hindu terms such as maya, brahma, atman karma, etc. in layman's language.

The primary sources with regard to their perceived uniqueness of Christ are based on interviews conducted in Malabar in January 2010 to June 2010. These interviews were conducted in the Malayalam language, translated into English and documented.

### Interviews

To understand the evangelism methods and strategies used in Malabar, the author interviewed a number of pastors and Christian workers. These interviews were done in relatively informal settings. Filling in forms and questionnaires often posed the risk of raising the suspicions of pastors and church leaders, who would often become unwilling to give honest answers; the reasons for this will be elaborated in "Research Methodology." Interviews also allowed the author to gain a more nuanced overview of the overall situation in Malabar, compared to surveys, which only gave information on a very specific group of indicators.

### Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to get data from HBBs to understand what the process of becoming a Christian was like for them. It was divided into four main sections, "Personal Information", "Coming to Christ", "Life in Christ", and "Growth in Christian Life." This author specifically designed the questionnaire this way to gain a comprehensive overview of the challenges HBBs face at the three stages of their life as a Christian, namely, "Coming to Christ", "Life in Christ", and "Growth in Christian Life".<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Appendix one.

A total of seventy people were interviewed<sup>16</sup> - forty women (57%) and thirty men (43%). The first section of the questionnaire aims at collecting personal information. The age of the group falls between twenty-two and fifty-six. All had basic<sup>17</sup> education. To respect individual privacy, the data is kept confidential, and after the data is collected, the author identified each person using a number rather than his or her name.

The second section aims to find out how HBBs came to know about Christianity and how decisive they were in joining the Church, as well as their first impressions of the Christian community.

The third section aims to uncover the changes HBBs had to make in their life when they joined the Church, as well as any communal or familial pressures they faced as a result of conversion.

The fourth section explores how HBBs developed in their Christian life after their initial struggles. For instance, they were asked if they had received or sought further theological training, whether they shared their religion with their families, and how they furthered their roles within the Church. Together, these three aspects of the questionnaire aim to provide a holistic picture of the struggles HBBs from Malabar face and how they react to the Christian community.

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<sup>16</sup> Details of interviews are discussed under the title "Research Methodology."

<sup>17</sup> Secondary school to masters degree.

## Library

The author extensively used the Trinity Theological College<sup>18</sup> library as a source of theological books and journals. A good collection of books on Hinduism was also found in the National Library of Singapore. The books on Hinduism were useful to a certain extent. However, books written by evangelicals were often biased against Hinduism. In such circumstances, the author referred to secular writers instead. An extensive collection of Indian books and journals dealing with the topic of Hinduism was also found in the ICCS<sup>19</sup> library.

Many thesis<sup>20</sup> papers were excellent sources for some of the background information. Some of these thesis were related to the context or to Hindu evangelism in general.

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<sup>18</sup> Trinity Theological College (TTC), Singapore.

<sup>19</sup> International College of Cultural Studies (ICCS), Hyderabad, India.

<sup>20</sup> These are some of the dissertations author referred to. These dissertations talk about Hinduism in general and Christianity from the Asian perspective.

H.L.Richard, *Exploring the Depths of the Mystery of Christ: K.Subba Rao's Eclectic Praxis of Hindu Discipleship to Jesus* (Bangalore: Centre for Contemporary Christianity, 2005), MA thesis, University of South Africa. Martin Alphonse, *The Gospel for the Hindus: A Study in Contextual Communication* (Chennai: Mission Educational Books, 2003), Doctoral dissertation, School of World Mission, Fuller Theological Seminary. Hwa Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas: The Quest For an Authentic Asian Christian Theology* (Cumbria: Regnum Books International, 2000). Doctoral dissertation, E.Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism, Asbury Theological Seminary. Solomon Rajah, *Folk Hinduism: A Study on the Practice of Blood Sacrifice in Peninsular Malaysia From a Christian Perspective* (Manila: The Association for Theological Education in South East Asia, 2000), Doctoral dissertation, South Asia Graduate School of Theology (SEAGST). R.H.S. Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 1998). Doctoral dissertation, University of Edinburgh. A.M.Abraham Ayrookuzhiel, *The Sacred in Popular Hinduism: An Empirical Study in Chirakkal, North Malabar*, 1983 (Madras: The Christian Literature Society). This book is a detailed study of popular Hinduism in Chirakkal, which is part of Malabar.

## Description of Terms

### Hindu

The term "Hindu" is used in a broad sense, including all types of Hindus<sup>21</sup> living in Malabar. Anyone who is born and brought up in a Hindu family is considered a Hindu. Malabar Hindus are unique in their cultural practices, even though they can identify with Hindus in other parts of India. Most of the Hindus in Malabar are either nominal or secular Hindus.<sup>22</sup>

### Malabar

Malabar refers to the geographical<sup>23</sup> region defined by the Northern half of Kerala. The native language in the region is Malayalam, though its spoken form and slang differs notably from where it is spoken elsewhere in Kerala. Malabar is also different from other parts of Kerala in terms of cultural practices and religion.

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<sup>21</sup> As described in chapter two. (Understanding Hindus in Malabar).

<sup>22</sup> Discussed detailed in chapter two.

<sup>23</sup> Map on chapter one. Figure one.

## Key Observations

### Section II. Question 1: How did you hear about Christ?

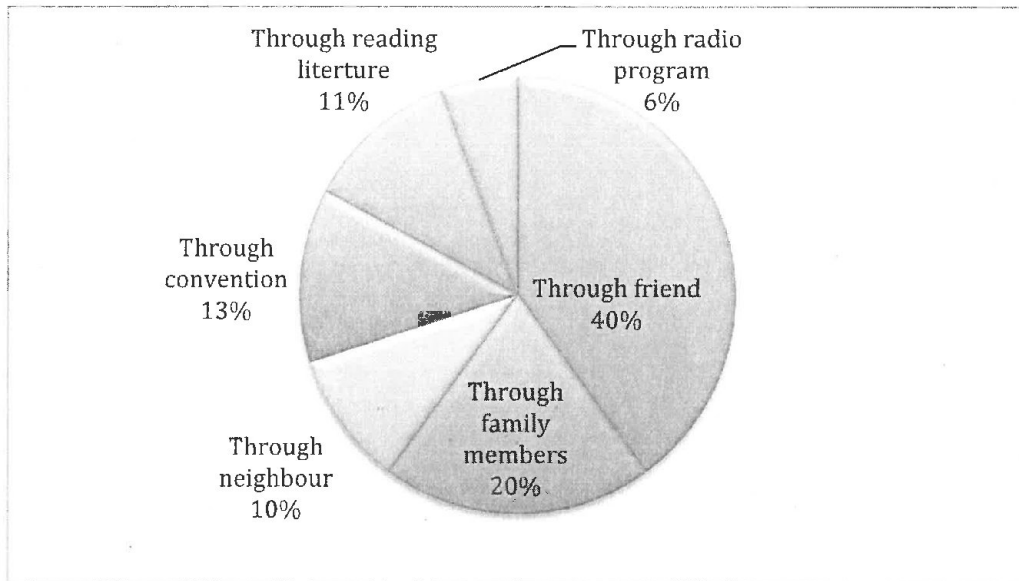


Figure 3. How did you hear about Christ?<sup>24</sup>

In the first section, the question on how they heard about Christ was asked. 40% of the participants, who made up the biggest group, responded that they heard about Christ through a friend and 20% said through family members. It is noted here that peer influence is an effective strategy to use for the communication of the gospel - personal evangelism by friends done in a non-threatening manner results in more success than any other method. Also noted is that 20% of them heard about Christ through their family members. In an extended family system where a lot of interaction takes place, the testimony of a member can eventually influence other family members. Friends and family members are ranked top gospel proclaimers.

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<sup>24</sup> Through friend : 28 people  
Through family members : 14 people  
Through neighbor : 7 people  
Through convention : 9 people  
Through reading literature : 8 people  
Through radio program : 4 people

According to the survey, the least effective method was listening to radio programs. One of the reasons is that people find the terminology used in the programs very foreign to them.

#### Section II. Question 7: Reasons for delay in making decision

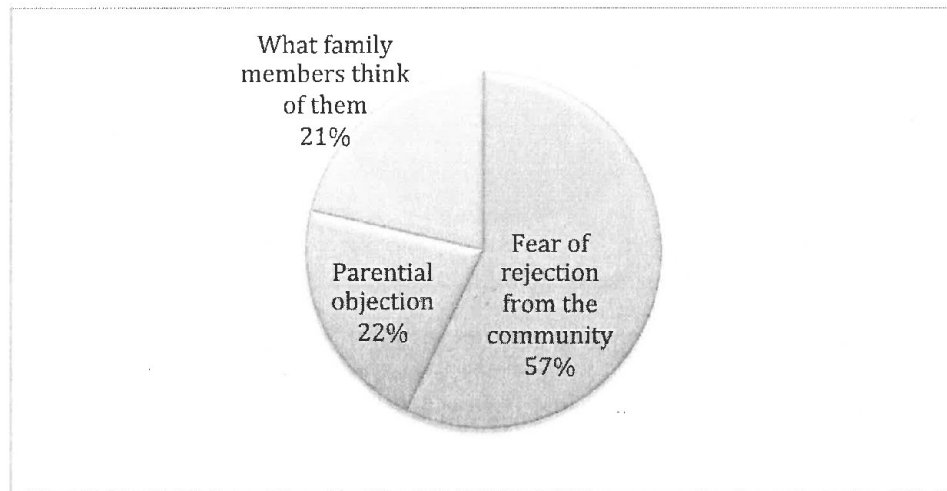


Figure 4. Reasons for delay in making decision<sup>25</sup>

Decision-making does not come immediately after hearing the gospel. Most of them delayed the decision-making. This is due to several factors, the chief being the fear of rejection from the community. In the survey, more than half of the respondents, 57%, indicated this as a reason. The next major factor is parental objection with 22% indicating this as a reason. Even though they are adults, they still consult their parents regarding major decisions such as changing one's belief system. It is also the culture that they stay with their parents in the extended family system. What family members think of them is also a very strong reason given for delay in making the decision to accept Christ.

<sup>25</sup> Fear of rejection from the community : 40 people  
Parental objection : 15 people  
What the family member think about them : 15 people



Section II. Question 12: What made you accept Christ?<sup>26</sup>

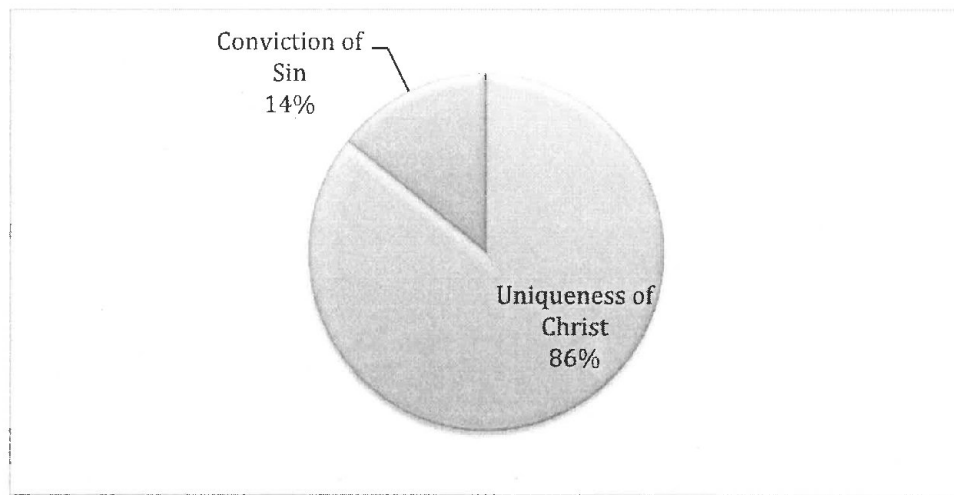


Figure 5. What made you accept Christ?<sup>27</sup>

For the question on what made Malabar Hindus accept Christ, it is very surprising to hear that most of them are first attracted to Christ because of His uniqueness. Also noted is that most of the Malabar Hindus are not against Christian teaching or against Christ. If it is the uniqueness of Christ that attracted these people to accept Him, then method is not the issue, but the way the message is presented is. Christ's holiness and purity made many people want to follow Him. The starting point of attraction for Hindus towards Christianity is Christ's unique outstanding character as compared to the many Hindu gurus, gods and goddesses. In spite of this, many traditional missionaries in Malabar still begin their message with Christ's death, burial and resurrection. Christ presented this way does not make much impression on Hindus.

<sup>26</sup> The author presented only these two options to the interviewees as in the relevant context he was only interested in a comparative analysis of these two reasons, given that in conventional evangelism the conviction of sin is often used as a way of trying to force people away from their religion, when the author's own experience leads him to believe that it is the uniqueness of Christ is a more significant factor. While other factors may well be at play, the key comparative lies only between these two.

<sup>27</sup> Uniqueness of Christ : 60 people  
Conviction of sin : 10 people

### Section III. Question 2: Who opposed you?

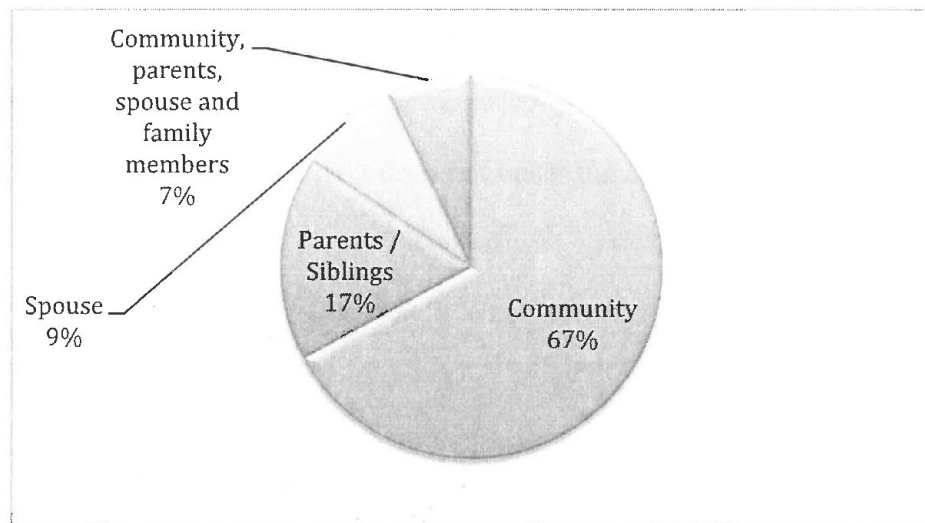


Figure 6. People who opposed you<sup>28</sup>

When looking at the people who opposed them, the highest percentage responded that opposition did not come from family members but from the community. The fear of rejection from the community and persecution from the community is very real. The community felt that the convert had betrayed his own community by accepting a foreign god into their community. This news usually spread very fast - one *panchayat*<sup>29</sup> to next *panchayat* at a lightning speed.

Christianity is perceived as western religion. "Christianity was brought into India by the boats of the western trader. It marched into our motherland under the shadow of the Union Jack. It flourished under the pelf and patronage of the foreign rulers. Now

<sup>28</sup> Community : 47 people  
Parents or siblings : 12 people  
Spouse : 6 people  
Above all : 5 people

<sup>29</sup> The name of the local government system within India. The rural system covers the village level. *Panchayat* literally means assembly (*yat*) of five (*panch*) respected elders chosen and accepted by the village community.

with the disappearance of the white man, the colonial appendage called Christianity deserves deportation."<sup>30</sup>

Dealing with community is pivotal. Evangelism strategy, follow up, discipleship need to be tailored in such a way that it does not upset the community where the HBB stays. Building bridges is the key.

### Section III. Question 3: What were the comments?

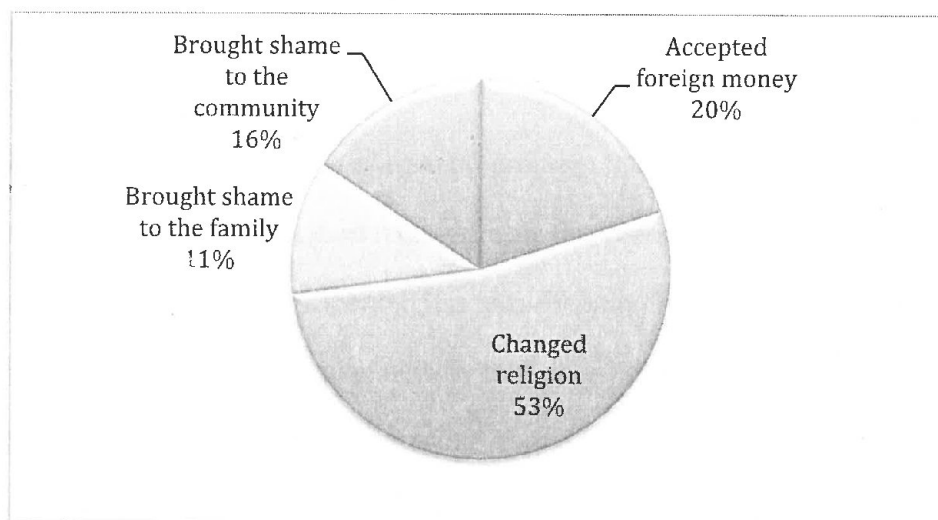


Figure 7. Comments from people<sup>31</sup>

Many Hindus equate the commitment of a HBB to follow Christ with changing of religion, in this case from Hinduism to Christianity.<sup>32</sup> This misunderstanding is very real. Data collected shows that 53% of the respondents were accused by the community for converting to Christianity, perceived as an established religion.

Another 20% were accused of changing religion in order to get foreign money

<sup>30</sup> Ebe Sunder Raj, *The Confusion Called Conversion*, 3rd ed. (New Delhi: TRACI Publications, 1988), 2.

<sup>31</sup> Accepted foreign money : 14 people  
Changed religion : 37 people  
Brought shame to the family : 8 people  
Brought shame to the community: 11 people

<sup>32</sup> In this context Christianity represents an established religion rather than following Christ.

as many Hindus looked at HBB as "rice Christian."<sup>33</sup>

"Shame is a dynamic that pressures people to conform to their group and so maintains harmony and peace...A person does not submit to the group's decision is ostracized. He continues to live in the village, but everyone treats him as nonexistent. This is a far greater punishment than being put in jail."<sup>34</sup> In the survey, people were of the opinion that HBBs had brought shame to their families (11%) but even more opined that they had brought shame to their community (16%).

The fourth section of the questionnaire focuses on their Christian life. The author wanted to know more about the type of training program that would be relevant for HBBs and the type of training they had received over the years. Author had lengthy discussions with many survey participants. The term "training" in the local language is very loosely used to mean any Christian activity that does not match the definition of training. So, the author needed to ask questions from different angles to capture the data he wanted. So, there are a total of twenty-one questions in this section.

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<sup>33</sup> Charles H. Kraft explains the term "rice Christian" in the following way: "Sometimes missionaries have even resorted to providing food, money, or political favors to win converts to their way of doing things. Such tactics led to the label 'rice Christians' for those who converted merely for what they could gain culturally." *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, gen. ed. A. Scott Moreau, s.v. "Cultural Conversion" (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 251.

<sup>34</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 111-112.

Section IV. Question 8: Have you ever received any type of training?

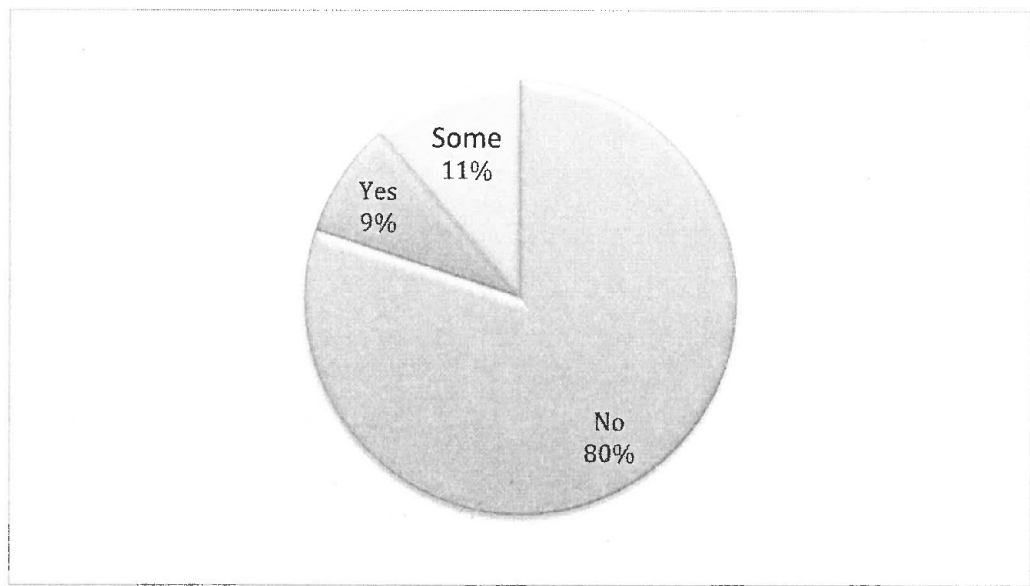


Figure 8. Have you received any type of training?<sup>35</sup>

For this question, the "Yes" response to receiving training refers to respondents going through structured training programs involving a prescribed curriculum conducted over a predetermined period of time. The "some" response refers to respondents listening to guest speakers in a local church and attending some special meetings conducted on an adhoc basis.

Many HBBs faced added opposition due to lack of structured training. When asked about their new found faith, their answers were not satisfactory for many. This resulted in more misunderstanding between them and the community. Some<sup>36</sup> succumbed to the pressure of the local Christians and adopted the "Christian" culture. They had their names changed, "Saraswathi" suddenly becoming Mary and "Janardhanan" becoming Joseph. Some even shaved their mustache and started

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<sup>35</sup> No : 56 people  
Yes : 6 people  
Some : 8 people

<sup>36</sup> Out of seventy HBBs interviewed, three indicated that they have changed their names.

wearing only white clothes because Pastor told them having a mustache and wearing colorful clothes is worldly! This had created even more suspicions among the Hindu community.

## CHAPTER 5

### OUTCOMES

Based on his research, the author would like to identify three different issues to be addressed in this chapter.

1. Fostering mutual understanding
2. Making the gospel relevant
3. Providing adequate training

#### **Fostering Mutual Understanding**

##### The Issue of "Conversion"

There is no such a thing as formal conversion in Hinduism. A Hindu is born, not made. There are technically no formal proceedings or rituals that demarcate a person's becoming a Hindu or a high-caste *brahmin*. But in recent years, things have changed. A non-Hindu can now become a Hindu. There have many recent conversions of westerners who are immediately elevated to the status of *brahmins* through *namakarana samskaras*<sup>1</sup> performed by Hindu priests. Anyone can now become a Hindu through ceremonial rites.

Christians should not merely "convert" people to Christianity, but bring them to Jesus Christ. Many Hindus do not like the word "conversion". When they come to believe in the Lord Jesus, they steadfastly resist being called a convert. To them the word "conversion" implies changing his or her religion for the sake of material benefit. During the interviews a recurring response was that HBBs dislike being called converts; to them, the word is a derogatory one, used to insult people.

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<sup>1</sup> Official change of name upon religious conversion.

To be converted also means that one is converted from his social, cultural and ethnic background. A Hindu does not like to be cut off from their communal roots. Never suggest to a Hindu that separation from family, or living environment, or culture is necessary when becoming a Christian. Instead, encourage a new believer to stay with his/her family. As Sanneh points out, "The individual act of conversion is not a rejection of community but the occasion for community."<sup>2</sup>

Among Hindus, conversion is viewed as not a change of inner convictions but change of religion and culture. Alienating them from their own culture is always seen as an act of subscription to a foreign culture, which is a western culture. So, the Hindu would like to retain the designation of being a Hindu and at the same time be called a "follower of Christ." Of all the interviewees spoken to, none had officially changed their religion from Hinduism to Christianity. They did not bother to go through the lengthy process of official change in religion; technically they are Hindus in terms of religious affiliation, not Christians.

Conversion is a gradual process for many HBBs. Evangelists must allow the Holy Spirit to move at His own pace. Most Hindus take a long time to accept Christ. Some of them take years to make a final decision. Even after a profession to Christ is made, an evangelist must be careful not to force quick changes regarding pictures of gods, charms, etc. He must be patient and let a person come to a full conviction in his own heart and mind before taking action. Often, there is a risk that many evangelists are trying to create converts, not true followers of Christ.

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<sup>2</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 45.



According to the survey, for instance, 21 out of 30 HBBs<sup>3</sup> were told by their pastors or church members to remove their traditional jewelry despite the fact that they preferred to continue wearing it and did not know why they were asked to do so.

Q. 5. A pastor or church member ask you to remove your ornaments and <i>pottu</i> <sup>4</sup> when you went to church	Yes 21	No 9	
Q. 6. Who told you to remove your ornaments?	Members 23	Pastor 7	
Q. 7. When you went to church with your <i>thali</i> <sup>5</sup> anyone look at you differently?	Yes 24	No 4	No difference 2

Figure 9. Interview questionnaire section III. Questions 5, 6 and 7

This is a simple illustration of how the church sometimes wastes its efforts on unnecessary superficialities that alienate HBBs and do not in fact bring them any closer to Christ or the Christian community. Many followers of Christ from a Hindu background in Malabar do not consider themselves converts from Hinduism; to profess themselves as such would be to acknowledge that they have betrayed their socio-cultural background. They hence officially remain within the Hindu religion. Most significantly, they never feel the need for a formal religious conversion. Formal conversion involves a person going to a lawyer with a letter from a priest and going through legal procedures including name-changing and an official declaration of religious affiliation in a government gazette. That person then formally becomes a Christian in religious terms. It is hardly surprising to see that few people choose to take up this option, given that it

<sup>3</sup> These are ladies from HBB background.

<sup>4</sup> A red powdered spot on the forehead, also known as *tilak*.

<sup>5</sup> Gold necklace. A *thali* necklace (also known as *mangalsutra*) is a necklace that is given in India by the groom's family to the bride, usually in place of a wedding ring.

entails such a conspicuous and unnecessary deracination from one's community and culture.

Lamin Sanneh rightly said about conversion,

Conversion is the turning of ourselves to God, and that means all of ourselves without leaving anything behind or outside. But that also means not replacing what is there with something else. Conversion is a refocusing of the mental life and its cultural/social underpinning and of our feelings, affections, and instincts, in the light of what God has done in Jesus. That is the most succinct and precise way I can think of defining the term.<sup>6</sup>

To convert Hindus in the truest sense of the word, then, ironically requires us to focus less on the official and superficial process of conversion – a process which involves outward changes designed to signal the individual's distance from his native community – and on the deeper need to make them followers of Christ.

Many Hindus also would not understand the western idea of a "decision." For them, decision-making does not involve a lone individual accepting a new faith. Often it is a family decision and not an individual one. Such a "decision" may also be made by a whole community.

### Effective Communication

There is a strong need to avoid the use of Christian jargon and labeling. A Hindu must be addressed as a Hindu and not as a heathen, pagan or non-Christian. A man is won not by calling him what he is not, but by what he is. Appeal to the heart. Unless one can converse with a Hindu and fully acknowledge his identity, it will be impossible to build any kind of meaningful personal relationship. Genuine caring friendship always brings delight to any Hindu, but this must be friendship that is genuine and without any selfish ulterior motives. To try to convince a Hindu that Jesus is Lord through nothing

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<sup>6</sup> Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity?*, 43-44.

but intellectual argument is something close to the impossible. A bond of trust and friendship, on the other hand, greatly facilitates this process, but it can only be created if those who seek to evangelize cease to use condescending Christian labels.

### Empathize with Hindus

There are lots of good things in the Hindu religion, and Christians cannot forget this. For many Hindus, religion and culture go hand in hand and are effectively inseparable. The church must understand that it is perfectly possible to adopt and adapt to cultural norms without losing the catholic nature of the church. Most importantly, church leaders must adopt a life-style that helps identification with Hindus. The automatic adoption of a westernized identity often serves only to alienate HBBs, and those HBBs which adopt this different culture are ostracized from their traditional communities, eliminating future opportunities for them to reach out to their community. Research turned up some very telling results; in the survey, forty seven out of seventy HBBs acknowledged facing pressures and difficulties from their community, while only twelve said they faced familial pressure.<sup>7</sup> It is clear that the local community is the chief source of the pressures HBBs face, and it is crucial to ease their transition into Christianity by not forcing them to jettison their local cultural identities.

Any good evangelist must learn to think as a Hindu thinks, and feel as he feels. Most Christians never experience rejection from their family members or community. Their religious devotion is groomed from their childhood. On the other hand, it will take

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<sup>7</sup> Community : 47 people  
Parents or siblings : 12 people  
Spouse : 6 people  
Above all : 5 people

Details are in Figure 5 chapter four. Section III. Question 2, Who opposed you?

Hindus some time to understand Christ and Christianity, and it would be wrong to unrealistically expect their transition to Christ to be quick and complete.

It is wise to acknowledge the mystery of God and our lack of any full understanding about his nature. Simplistic answers offend the Hindu sense of the incomprehensibility of the Divine. The supreme approach in presenting Christ to the Hindu is to share our testimony, describing own personal experience of being lost and how God's gracious forgiveness and peace removed us from that state. There is no need to claim to know God in his majesty and fullness, but share what we know in our life and experience. As Hiebert points out, "By equating Christianity with western culture, we have used the gospel to reinforce our sense of cultural superiority, and we have made the gospel foreign to other cultures by asking people to convert to our culture to become Christians."<sup>8</sup>

The churches in Malabar need to identify receptive pockets and become involved in reaching them. Receptivity can be different from town to town and village to village. Understanding different types of Hindu groups of people is very essential. It is not true that all Hindus are philosophical or idol worshippers. Many individuals may be a Hindu by official classification but may not be practicing their religion with any particular devotion.

The church also needs to acknowledge her failures and weaknesses. Defending wrong practices in the church and western Christianity only indicates that we are more concerned for our insular and isolated community than we are for truth. The biggest need is for Christians to live like Christians, in a way that is open, caring, and respectful of local cultures and identities. Then people will know the difference being a Christian

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<sup>8</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 53.

makes. Most of the time, Hindus see that Christians are not much better than Hindus in the way they behave toward other people. Very often Christians' claims are not supported by their lifestyle, and such negative testimony only makes the task of reaching out to Hindus harder.

### Acceptance

HBBs are people with special needs and whose transition into Christian life must be overseen with tender care. Having decided to follow Christ and depart from a Hindu religious background, living with Hindu family members and the pressure from the community can be too much to handle for many. This experience can be traumatic, especially for the unprepared.

Helping HBBs to integrate with the church takes time and energy. For many HBBs it is a new experience to step into the church, and the church often looks at these people with suspicion. So, the HBB is caught between the church and his own community, and finds that he does not belong to either. This is the point at which real discipleship becomes crucial. "We need to practice an incarnational approach to mission. This involves the befriending of our Hindu neighbors and identifying with them. It implies the need for making costly cultural adaptations without compromising on basic Christian principles. These are some of the non-verbal means of making the Gospel communicable."<sup>9</sup>

The caste system is an unfortunate reality, and it should not be used as an excuse to look down on HBBs, a tendency that needs to be eliminated. Acceptance into the Christian community is not very easy for many HBBs. There is a silent "superiority

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<sup>9</sup> Lazarus, *Proclaiming*, 46.

mentality" Christians possess that tells the HBBs that they are not truly welcome in the Church. Statements like the following, though true in the most technical sense of the word, convey an attitude that borders on the neocolonial: "India needs the redemptive rule of God to counteract the evils of caste discrimination, exploitation, oppression, and rampant corruption on every side and to correct many evil structures that dehumanize people in our Indian society. Only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can break the chains of evil structures. The Kingdom of God is the answer to the ills of India."<sup>10</sup> The church should take its example from Apostle Paul:

Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1Cor 9:19-23)

An attitude of humility is the one which best conveys the nature of the good Christian life; "Non believers often respond to people, gifted or not, who are accessible to God, used by God and blessed by God through the working of His Holy Spirit."<sup>11</sup>

### **Effective Evangelism**

There are many success stories about evangelism which are widely promoted, which often gives the false impression that evangelism in Malabar is relatively simple and that people become Christians without much thought or consideration. The amount

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<sup>10</sup> Sam Lazarus, ed., *Proclaiming the Christ: A Handbook of Indigenous Missions in India* (Madras: Church Growth Association of India, 1992), 39.

<sup>11</sup> George Barna. *Evangelism That Works: How To Reach Changing Generations With The Unchanging Gospel* (California: Regal Books, 1995), 14.

of information released that constantly suggests that the people of Malabar are already Christians is staggering. Exaggeration is an unfortunate but common occurrence. Former India Mission Association (IMA)<sup>12</sup> General Secretary, Ebenezer Sunder Raj, explains this phenomenon:

Sensational and exaggerated report of achievements has become the norm because some donors and supporters are used to superlative salesman language. Such reports unfortunately claim astronomical achievements. It breaks our hearts to realize the extent Christian ministries compromise with half-truths and non-truths. A more serious fact is that all these tall reports and exaggerated statistics are picked up and quoted by communal organizations in India as documented evidence of "foreign funded massive proselytizing activity by the Indian Christians" and "illegitimate activities of Christians."<sup>13</sup>

### The Uniqueness of Christ

Out of seventy HBBs surveyed, sixty confessed that they decided to follow Christ before they made the sinners' prayer. They were fundamentally attracted, they claimed, to the uniqueness of Christ. Rather than questioning his unique and complex divine status, they were attracted to it. This may be the most important discovery the surveys and interviews yielded.<sup>14</sup> But when the author talked to pastors and Christian leaders, he found that they were stuck with traditional methods of evangelism, often introducing

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<sup>12</sup> India Missions Associations is the national federation of missions in India, which assists missions and churches in the proclamation of the gospel and making disciples of Jesus Christ among all peoples, languages and geographical areas through members who partner to share resources, research and training by their effective accountability and care of their personnel. At present IMA represents 220 Indian mission organizations, agencies and church groups and more than 40,000 Christian workers within India and beyond.

<sup>13</sup> Bridge News, April 2005, "A Closer Look: Why Should We Avoid Sensational Reporting?," India Missions Association, <http://www.imaindia.org/Newsletters/Bridge/April-2005.pdf> (accessed 22 March 2011).

<sup>14</sup> Author directly asked this question to 70 HBB: What makes you to accept Christ – conviction of sin or attracted towards the uniqueness of Christ? Questionnaire section II, question 14. Details are in chapter four figure 3. This interview is conducted in January 2010.

Uniqueness of Christ	: 60 people (86%)
Conviction of sin	: 10 people (14%)

Christianity by explaining concepts such as "all men are sinners" or "the wages of sin is death".

It is necessary to change the pattern of gospel presentation. Instead of starting with the universal nature of sin and repentance, gospel presentation needs to start with the uniqueness of Christ. For Hindus who are used to the notion of a pantheon of Gods and multiple *avatars*, Christ's uniqueness in terms of his message and role possesses a mesmerizing fascination. Most Hindus start to follow Christ because of his unreplicable stature, rather than a personal conviction about needing forgiveness for their sins. It is only later that they start to understand the significance of sin and the need for repentance. To bring Hindus to Christ, more stress on the uniqueness of Christ is needed.

Christ differs from Hindu conceptions of the *avatar* in several very significant ways. His incarnation (not as a physical being, but his conceptualization as the Son of God and the Son of Man) was a permanent one, and an embodiment we appeal to even today, whereas the appearance of the Hindu *avatar* is temporary. His incarnation was something that was needed only once to fulfill its fundamental purpose, whereas avatars often reappear. He was God as much as he was a man and his ascension was unique. In the Bhagavad Gita, the Krishna *avatar* is incomplete and undergoes a series of remakings, whereas Christ's *avatar* is a complete one, perfect from its inception. Krishna's incarnation is not a free act of God; it is compelled by *karma*; on the other hand, Christ a purely voluntary manifestation of the mercy and grace of God. For many Hindus, an incarnation is simply another form of a God. The biblical concept of incarnation, contrary to this, represents the unique and singular act in history where God initiated his redemptive purpose for man by clothing divine infallibility in fallible



flesh. The Bible must be used to clearly show Christ's uniqueness and his purpose of redemption and mercy.

### Build Bridges

Building bridges, not barriers, is very important. There are differences in the theologies of both religions, but evangelists need to learn to focus on the areas where they agree. There is a great respect for the spiritual world in Hinduism. The mystery of God is very real for many Hindus. The Indian proverb says "If we cut off a person's nose, there is no point in giving him a flower to smell." If the Hindu religion is relentlessly criticized, it becomes patently unconvincing for us to tell a Hindu that Jesus loves him. They are prevented from appreciating the aroma of the Gospel because we who criticized them have cut ourselves off from them. It is a sad reality that Christians make statements like "Hinduism is a pagan religion. There is no truth in it at all." Anyone who wants to work among the Hindus in Malabar needs to understand the complex system of Hindu religious beliefs, perhaps not in a very academic way, but in a way that gives them a strong grasp of its basic concepts.

One of the major reasons for the limited success in attempts at conversion among the Hindus is that Christians do not do sufficient homework in trying to understand them. Understanding some of the Hindus' theological issues is important – as demonstrated earlier, we can use these to convey the uniqueness of Christ, and many common concepts can be borrowed to aid ease of explanation and to allow them to understand Christianity without forsaking their culture. The biblical pattern from Acts 17 can be used to introduce Christianity to the Hindu. It is necessary to try to build a bridge from Hindu scriptures to the Bible and Christ.

Respecting the customs and practices of Hindus is very important. Some of them are vegetarian and conservative in their dressing. So, any person who seeks to evangelize them should also be modest in dress and behavior.

A consistently Christ-like life is the single most important factor in sharing the gospel with Hindus. To sum up what was said before, criticisms of Hinduism or doctrinal debates rarely help; instead they often harm the cause of the gospel. Pointing out the worst aspects of Hinduism is hardly the way to win friends. Theological bridges are very important in the area of clear communication of the gospel. These are some of the theological bridges that have emerged from long discussions in Pattaya, Thailand.<sup>15</sup>

(i) *The concept of God*: In evangelism among the Hindus we are speaking into a pantheistic world view, and although clarification and re-definition are required, it is not necessary to defend the existence of God.

(ii) *Respect for Scripture*: The Hindu respect for the sacred writings can be developed in the context of the unique authority of the Bible. Unlike any other religious community, Hindus will listen attentively to an exposition of scripture. The sole authority of the Bible must be stressed without any compromise whatsoever.

(iii) *The person of Christ*: The quality of Christ's relationship with people, his teachings (particularly the Sermon on the Mount), and his unique vicarious self-giving and suffering have a strong appeal to the Hindu. As the Christian communicator fills this respect for Christ with an understanding of the unique and absolute claim to be "the Word made flesh," a significant bridge may be built.

(iv) *The doctrine of karma*: While this doctrine is a barrier in terms of defining moksha (salvation), it also can serve as a bridge while communicating the gospel to the Hindu. The Hindu seeks to get free from the cycle of rebirth which his sin causes. He must be told the Saviour Jesus Christ, who by his vicarious suffering and death on the cross triumphed over sin, and has taken upon himself the penalty of the sin of mankind.

Understanding Hindus is both challenging and demanding. There are difficulties to be overcome, misunderstandings to be addressed, prejudices to be removed and

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<sup>15</sup> "Christian Witness to Hindus," Lausanne Occasional Papers, (LOP) emerging from Consultation on World Evangelization (COWE) held in Pattaya, Thailand, June 1980.

suspensions to be allayed. Often, the Gospel is not the issue, but the method of presentation is:

I once saw an American traveller in India throw a beautiful California apple from the railway-carriage window to the crowd standing on the station platform. He expected to see a mad scramble. But no one touched it; instead they stood around in lofty disdain and let the apple lie. He had thrown it! Had he called one to him and presented it as a friend – well, that would have been different. Much depends on how you present what you have to the East.<sup>16</sup>

This anecdote underscores the importance of giving the gift of God's salvation to Hindus in a manner that is not condescending, but that embodies humility and respect. Christians need to learn to appreciate and develop a non-traditional Christian musical form that Hindus can identify with. Hymns are good and rich in meaning, but many Hindus do not understand the strange tunes associated with them. These tunes are not only foreign, but are often associated with funeral rituals and occasions of mourning – it would be unfortunate if our hymns become representations of grief rather than expressions of praise for God. Also, HBBs in Malabar should not reject the term, *bhakti*. If *bhakti* is rejected just because it is a term well-known in Hinduism, the presenter discards one of the most important concepts that is common to both Christianity and Hinduism. Christianity is a religion of love; in real terms, therefore, Christians are in fact *Christubhaktas*.<sup>17</sup> The *bhakti* aspect of spirituality has so much potential not only to inform spiritual formation but also to encourage Hindus to enter such a process of forming a spiritual relationship based on complete devotion to God.

In Malabar, spirituality revolves around the concept of *bhakti* to a very large extent. Many Christians are either ignorant or prejudiced regarding Indian ways but are more comfortable thinking in western terms, and hence instinctively reject this concept.

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<sup>16</sup> E. Stanley Jones, *Along the Indian Road* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1939), 19.

<sup>17</sup> Worshipper of Christ.

The opposite should be the case; Christians should embrace local culture and incorporate it as far as possible in their attempts to reach out to Hindus. In Malabar, churches need to learn more about their spiritual heritage in Indian culture and express themselves in a non-syncretic manner. They should give the living water of Christ in an Indian cup. Then, the Indians will drink.

### Do Not Argue

It is not ideal to attempt to win Hindus through argument. It rarely works. There are enough arguments and ideas in the Hindu scriptures that will allow a Hindu to construct a series of logical defenses for his religion. Often, the logic that is employed only befuddles the person trying to evangelize, as internal consistencies in doctrine matter far less to the Hindu than they do to the Christian. For a successful attempt at evangelization, it is necessary to center on Christ. An argument only brings more animosity, and risks both parties misunderstanding each other even further, especially as Hinduism as a concept is particularly complex and it may not be clear which particular branch of Hinduism a person is dealing with. There already exists in Hinduism a wide range of conceptions of God. Some schools of Hinduism are even against idol worship<sup>18</sup> but they still remain in Hinduism.

Patience and humility, as opposed to hostile confrontation, are essential in work among Hindus. A life reflecting the reality of a "still and quiet soul" (Psalm 131) will never be despised by Hindus. It is vital that Christ becomes the focus of any attempt at outreach, as Hindus tend to be willing to accept the person of Christ.

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<sup>18</sup> Timothy C. Tennent, *Christianity at the Religious Roundtable: Evangelicalism in Conversation with Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 37–86. In this book he lengthily discussed of Sankara's *advaitism* and Ramanuja's *visistadvaitism*. These are two different schools of thought but still remains in Hinduism.

## Literature and Media

People in Malabar are educated, and there is a need to produce relevant Christian literature for them. In Kerala, the communists distribute millions of pieces of literature every year. Christians should also be at the forefront, using such methods to reach Hindus for Christ. However, most of Malabar's evangelistic literature is designed for those who have only primary education. Some of the evangelistic booklets and tracts are direct translations from sources published in English-speaking nations, as many mission organizations wish to reduce the cost of creating and printing such material. This literature may look attractive, but holds little appeal for or resonance with locals.

There is a need to specifically tailor Christian literature in a manner that makes it appeal to local sensibilities. The author would like to see versions on the New Testament begin with gospel of John instead of Matthew, as the first few verses of genealogy in Matthew will discourage Hindus from attempting to read any of the following chapters, no matter how rich or interesting they may be.

Many Christian television programs are available in Malabar. Unfortunately, most of these programs are irrelevant to Hindus. The majority of the programs are from the west, as western organizations tend to have the capital to purchase television timeslots. However, Hindus simply cannot relate to the Gospel when it is spread this way. There needs to be a dedicated program that aims to appeal to Hindus by displaying the uniqueness of Christianity and building bridges with the local religion.

## Pray with Hindus

Hindus like prayer and are happy to hear Christian prayer. Prayer is by no means a new concept for Hindus. Most Hindus have a habit of waking up early in the morning

to pray. Some also have their own small shrines at home. Before they go to work, they bow before their favorite idols for a blessing. A Hindu household is centered around prayers throughout the year. Christians need not prove that God answers prayers or teach Hindus how to pray. Some Hindus even keep a picture of Jesus among other Hindu gods and goddesses; they believe that any God can answer their prayers. Given how closely linked to the concept of prayer Hinduism is, praying with Hindus is one of the best ways to establish a common religious bond with them, one that will help to bring them to Christ.

For many years the author was active in hospital evangelism. In his experience, no Hindu objected when he prayed for their healing. Hindus enter prayer with a sense of reverence and gratefulness. It is also often perfectly appropriate to lead in prayer and worship together with a Hindu friend. Hinduism has a grand tradition of deep spirituality, and so it is only by deeply spiritual means that Hindus can be expected to be brought to the feet of Jesus Christ. Praying with a Hindu is a gesture as simple as it is profound, establishing commonalities that can only do good.

### **Training**

The need for training among HBBs is expressed in different levels. HBBs want to know more about the Bible and how to stand firm in the midst of persecution and hostility at home or in their communities. Secondly, even though they know they are the best agents in their home to present the gospel to their loved ones, many times they do not know how to begin. Thirdly, they often possess a strong passion to evangelize to their own community. Almost all of the HBBs the author interviewed or surveyed said that they want to evangelize their own community and that they feel that they can do a

better job than a pastor or evangelist. This is caused by the fear among HBBs that pastors or evangelists may not understand the complexity of religious and family issues.

Training, therefore, must play a very important part in developing the Christian life of HBBs. Yet out of the seventy people interviewed, forty-five said they have never had any training.<sup>19</sup>

This group of people also mentioned that they had come to know the Lord through friendship. Training HBBs to stand firm in their religion is an excellent way of equipping them to become transformative agents in the lives of their own friends and relatives. At the moment, however, there is no structured training program for HBBs in Malabar. Some level of training will help them integrate with the Christian community and become a better-equipped soldier for the Word. The future evangelization of India hinges very much on how these new believers are nurtured and developed.

Over the years, author conducted a number of training programs, and has developed a curriculum in nine parts that aims to comprehensively convey the doctrines of Christianity in a manner that empowers them to develop a personal ministry that will not alienate Hindus. The curriculum is as follows:

### **Core Training Outcomes for One-Month Course<sup>20</sup>**

*Objectives is that at the end of the training program, the HBBs will:*

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<sup>19</sup> Yes : 56 people  
No : 6 people  
Some : 8 people

Author directly asked this question to 70 HBB: Questionnaire section IV, question 8. Details are in chapter four figure 7. This interview is conducted in January 2010.

<sup>20</sup> This training outcome is adopted from Operation Mobilization's core values. Richard Briggs, ed., *Global Action: Operation Mobilisation's Core Study Manual* (Cumbria: OM Publishing, 1997), 4.

**1. Knowing and glorifying God** (giving God all the glory, Christ-centered, putting God first in everything, intimacy with God)

- have a meaningful devotional life based on God's word, personal prayer and hip
- be progressing in demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit in daily living
- be able to communicate appreciation for his/her position, identity and acceptance in Christ
- have learnt to exercise faith in God, both as a way of life and in response to particular challenges

**2. Living in submission to God's Word** (biblical discipleship)

- have successfully completed and be applying what they have studied
- have developed a more consistent attitude of trust in and obedience to God's word

**3. Being people of grace and integrity** (integrity in relationships, gracious servanthood, personal integrity)

- take responsibility for his/her choices and actions
- handle money and possessions with integrity
- communicate with kindness, respect and genuineness
- apply biblical criteria when making moral decisions
- demonstrate progress in maintaining a balanced and disciplined lifestyle

**4. Serving sacrificially** (sacrificial lifestyle, sacrificial commitment)

- be learning to serve others willingly, sacrificially and unselfishly
- be learning to share cheerfully from his/her resources
- be learning to persevere in the face of difficulties and trials
- be learning to respond with love and wisdom to various evidences of economic disparity

**5. Evangelism** (Malabar evangelism)

- be able to share his/her personal testimony
- be able to adapt their presentation of the gospel to various situations
- be able to lead someone to faith in Christ
- have been given opportunities to develop a concern for the lost
- have actively pursued friendships with Hindus
- understand the significance of and be able to do initial follow-up and on-going discipleship

**6. India intercession** (intercessory prayer, mobilizing prayer)

- have made regular use of materials such as "Operation World", prayer letters, etc. Pray for India and unreached people



- have developed a practice of praying both corporately and individually for the needs of the world both locally and globally
  - have developed a balanced and biblical understanding of spiritual warfare
- 7. Esteeming the church** (partnership with the church, interdependence with the church, church mobilization, serving with the body of Christ)
- have consistently maintained an accountable relationship with his/her home church, prayer and support partners
  - have participated in regular worship and fellowship with other believers
  - show an attitude of respect to local church leadership
  - have recognized and begun exercising his/her spiritual gifts in the body of Christ
- 8. Loving and valuing people** (investing in people, people development, our people are important)
- be able to apply biblical teaching on repentance, confession and forgiveness in their relationships
  - be seen to put into practice biblical teaching on loving, caring, esteeming and encouraging others
  - be seen to put into practice the basic principles for handling interpersonal conflicts

Such training will also be important in helping HBB find answers to their struggles. Over the course of his research, the author came across certain recurring concerns. The first issue, the issue of marriage, was raised several times. Men find it hard to find a suitable partner within the Christian community and in a culture where arranged marriages are common and the decision on the spouse is as much that of the family as it is that of the bride, female HBBs often face acute familial pressure to marry Hindus.<sup>21</sup> Female HBBs face a set of problem that men usually do not; this explains why the sex ratio among HBBs is skewed in favor of the men.

Funerary issues were another constant concern. This is a serious issue for many HBBs. They are uncertain as to the nature of their funeral: Will it be a “Christian” or a “Hindu” one, and who will make and defend their decisions for them? Many HBBs are

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<sup>21</sup> Suresh Babu, interview by author, Cannanore, Kerala, 10 December, 2010.

stuck in a dilemma. The Church wants to conduct the funeral service in a "Christian" way and bury the body in a cemetery. However, a Hindu funeral normally takes place in a common crematorium.<sup>22</sup> They often want to avoid being buried in Christian cemetery as this will bring shame to the family, given that the funeral is a public display and the community is involved in decision-making. However, they face pressure from the Church to do otherwise.

Furthermore, there is a deep sense of internal belonging among HBBs. They strongly feel they are different from other Christians and experience a strong pull towards other HBBs in their local communities or areas. At the same time, HBBs also feel like they are not really part of any pre-existing denomination or Christian community. This is caused partially by the tension they experience between not wanting to abandon their intimate communities or loved ones and wanting to become a Christian, a between not wanting to lose their identity as a Hindu, yet wanting to become a personal follower of Jesus Christ.

Last of all, many HBBs feel that there is a need among their community for more figures of leadership as they perceive themselves as a leaderless community that needs the guidance of a strong figure. A good training course is one that equips them to face all these challenges by equipping them to become future leaders, by letting them turn to Jesus without having to lose their cultural identities or extirpate communal connections, and by giving them the courage and conviction they need.

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<sup>22</sup> In the Malabar context, a crematorium is very different from a traditional modern crematorium. These are usually located on *shmashana* (funeral grounds), open ground near a river or sea. Funeral rituals are usually conducted by the community, not a professional crematorium worker. Immediately after death, the body is placed on the floor of the crematorium or home. An oil lamp is lit and placed near the body, and is kept burning continuously for the first three days following death. Then, the body is bathed in water, and dressed in new clothes. At the *shmashana*, a pyre (out of wood) is prepared, on which the corpse is laid. Thereafter, the eldest son walks around the pyre three times, sprinkling water onto the pyre from a vessel. He then sets the pyre alight with a fire. After one or two days have passed, the family returns to the cremation ground to collect the mortal remains and put them in an urn. These remains are then immersed in a river or sea.

## Reaching their Own People

Evangelists should form small groups among new believers and encourage them to reach their own people. When a person evangelizes his or her community, no one is going to challenge that person. When the author accepted Christ, he was alone. Then he evangelized his family members.

Extraction evangelization is not very practical. Once an evangelist pulls out a person from a family it is hard to go back and share the gospel again to that family. It is crucial to always encourage the person to stay with his or her own family even though it may be tough. This represents a tremendous opportunity to share gospel within the familial unity. Eventually, the family will accept the newfound faith of the HBB. Training comes in as a handy tool here. Hindus who have become believers are the best potential evangelists. They remain in their communities and therefore need not learn any new culture or language. Via training HBBs as evangelists and pastors, Malabar can be evangelized much faster.

The home is the perfect neutral place for any conversion and creates an atmosphere where people can discuss spiritual issues without any fear. For a Christian trying to understand a Hindu, it should be noted that conversion should be genuine but need not always be religious in nature. Many issues of daily life are common to both Hindus and Christians. The Christian should always aim to be pleasant and hospitable. Sharing testimony in a non-threatening casual way is an excellent strategy. At the same time, there is a need to avoid triumphalistic claims or ridiculing Hindu belief systems.

Very often pastors or evangelists have very little idea about the background of a HBB, and when a Hindu shows an interest in Christ, the way they handle him is very

different from the way they handle a nominal Christian. George Samuel put it beautifully:

In the midst of a large number of decisions from among the nominal Christians, the new seekers from a non-Christian background are not properly looked after. Usually their numbers will be very negligible, and if they reveal their identity at all by, for example, signing a decision card, it is very embarrassing for the organizers to invite them into the existing church full of nominal Christians and their associated problems.<sup>23</sup>

The author has conducted a number of training programs for Hindu believers in Malabar, and often receives feedback from HBBs that this is the first time they have ever heard such simple or basic messages from the Bible. Most of the Bible school curricula does not cater to the needs of Hindu believers. There is an urgent need to start a training program for them. It does not have to be an accredited program but must be something which can meet their needs. Most of the HBBs desperately want to know how to stand firm amidst persecution, and teaching is crucial in meeting this need. Currently, most of the discipleship programs in Malabar are tailored for those who come from Christian background.<sup>24</sup>

#### “Win the Winnable”: A Philosophy that Must be Changed

Currently, there is an overemphasis placed on reaching the underprivileged in Malabar. Missionaries and churches are only found among the poorest communities, making Christianity a “poor man’s religion”. While there is nothing wrong trying to reach the poor and needy, there is a need to reach out to those who occupy higher social positions as well. These people are not only open to the gospel, but are important in providing missionaries with the economic backing they so often lack. Most of the Malabar

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<sup>23</sup> Samuel, *Caste in Kerala*, 313.

<sup>24</sup> Those who are born and brought up in a nominal Christian background.

Hindus are not downtrodden people. This current strategic weakness of the evangelistic movement stems from a flawed "Win the Winnable" philosophy that has to be consciously revised. While efforts among the poor are laudable, there needs to be a much broader scope to the current efforts at evangelism in Malabar.

### Personal Theological Reflection

From his personal experience, the author has fashioned three areas of self-reflection that can help a Hindu reassess his religious identity. The final processes of Deletion, Revision, and Affirmation must be applied to his/her prior religious experience, to come to a full understanding of Christianity. There are some aspects of the Hindu religious experience that can be kept, and some that must be discarded. It is crucial that each Hindu realizes this on their path to becoming a Christian.

#### **a. Personal Experience as a Hindu**

##### Environment

- Surrounded by temples; for the first twenty years of the author's life he woke up to singing from the temple. Family influence: Mum was a devoted Hindu and brother was a guru.

##### Involvement

- Co-operative Hindu worship on Sunday mornings and special singing session known as *bhajan* on Thursdays. A misconception that Christians often hold is that there is no co-operative worship in Hinduism, yet the author knows from personal experience that this is clearly not the case for Hinduism.

#### **b. Reflection**

Connection with gods – *bhakti*

Follow a pattern of ritual - daily, monthly, yearly remembrance of God designed by the community over the years

#### **c. Personal response**

Deletion: Idolatry, Extremism

Revision:	Removing shoes, respecting holy places, reverence in worship
Affirmation:	Religious zeal Beauty of worship Reverence Commitment Obedience Style of worship

In all of the above, the elements of worship can be easily identified. In many ways, the Hindu religious experience provides a good point from which the Hindu can come to understand and enter Christian traditions of worship without giving up their cultural identity.

### **Conclusion**

The Malabar Hindus do not fit the stereotypes that many missionary organizations attempt to portray them; many of them are well-educated and live a comfortable middle-class life, and it can hardly be said that they are a downtrodden people of street beggars. Yet, even though they may defy preconceptions, they deserve the gospel as much as anyone else, especially so because efforts to reach out to them so far have been wanting.

The crux of the changes this thesis paper advocates hinges around the notion of cultural sensitivity and adaptation. The Hindu religion is a complex one, and for Christians to simply dismiss it wholesale would be a grave mistake. This paper argues for a more discriminating and nuanced approach that urges evangelistic efforts to adopt a greater attitude of humility, as opposed to criticism, confrontation, or condescension, and which uses the processes of deletion, revision and affirmation of "Hindu" concepts to build bridges to the Hindu communities in Malabar. Through this, the three processes - fostering mutual understanding, making the gospel relevant, and providing adequate

training can be employed to bring HBBs into the full embrace of Christianity without forcing them to abandon their communities, and, indeed, doing the exact opposite – empowering them to become firmly rooted in both Christianity and their local culture, so that they become powerful testimony within their own families and communities in a way that no external Church leader or pastor can. God’s people and the church have a responsibility towards the HBBs, to turn them not into mere “converts” but into disciples for Christ, ready to reach out to the millions who are still unsaved.

Centuries ago, the author’s ancestors prayed:

Lead me from Untruth to Truth  
Led me from Darkness to Light  
Lead me from Mortality to Immortality.<sup>25</sup>

Today, millions of Hindus are still chanting this ancient, holy, prayer. They are searching for God using the *Jhana Marga* (The Way of Knowledge), the *Bhakti Marga* (The Way of Devotion), and *Karma Marga* (The Way of Deeds), but they have yet to find God. Yet Jesus, in claiming that He is the way, the truth, and the light, had already answered all the questions of that prayer. Christ is the only teacher of the *Jhana Marga*, the only God of *Bhakti Marga*, and the supreme act of sacrifice in the *Karma Marga*. To bring his message to the Hindus of Malabar is a duty Christians cannot neglect.

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<sup>25</sup> *Asatho ma satgamaya*  
*Thamaso ma jeotirgamaya*  
*Mrithio ma mamruthamgamaya,*  
- Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 1.3.28

## APPENDIX 1

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

#### I. PERSONAL INFORMATION

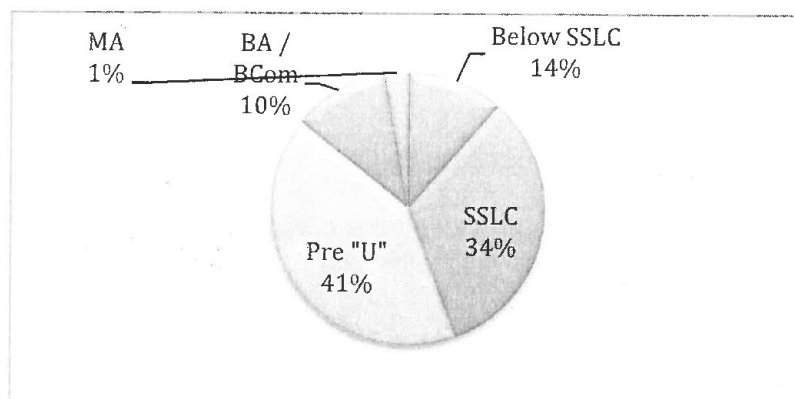
The author interviewed a total of seventy people from different parts of Malabar.

1. Name: The author wants to know if the interviewee is from a Hindu background. One can tell whether a person is from Hindu background by his or her name.

2. Sex

Male 57% (40) Female 43% (30)

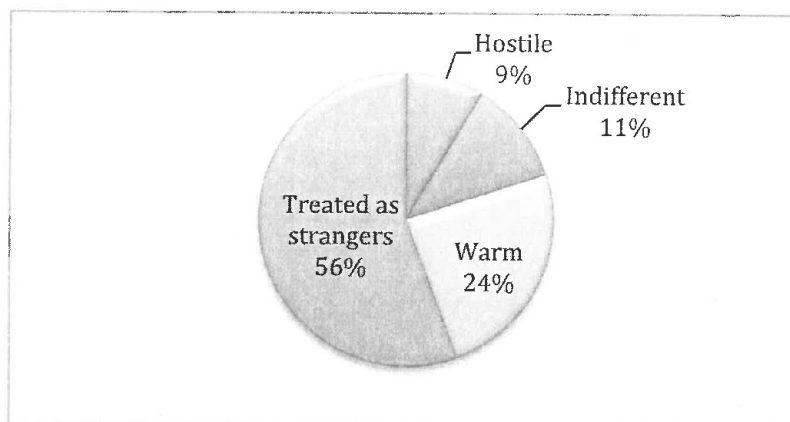
3. Date of birth



4. Native birthplace:

This question was specifically asked to find out if they are born and brought up in Malabar. In this survey all participants are born and brought up in Malabar.

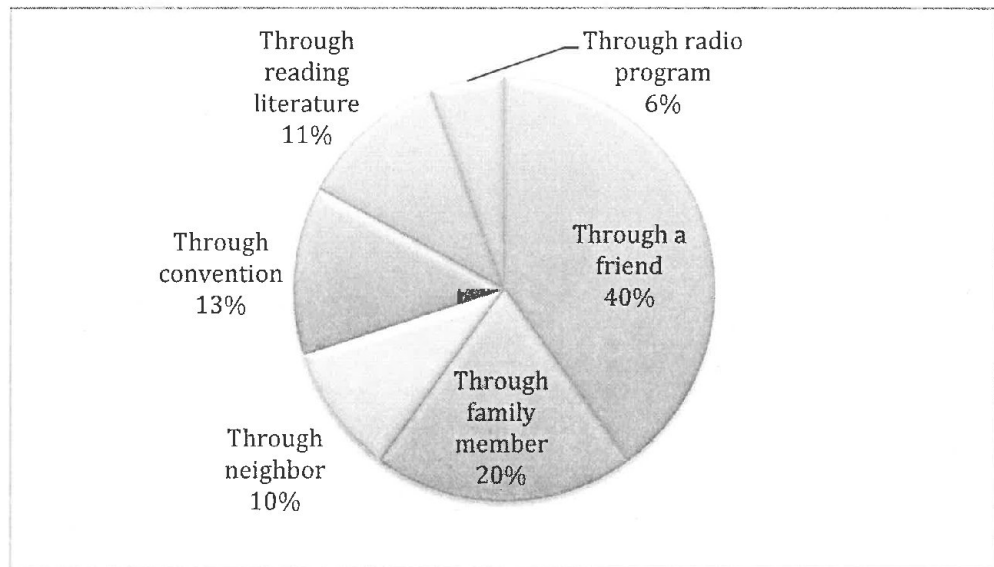
5. Educational Qualification





## II. COMINIG TO CHRIST

### 1. How did you hear about Christ?



### 2. If it is through radio program – which program?

The author wants to know if radio is a popular media among the Malabar Hindus. Not many people tune in to listen to the radio. Only ten people said they have listened to a Christian radio program before.

### 3. If it is through a pastor – which church pastor?

Only Brethren and Pentecostal church pastors shared the gospel with Hindus. None of the participants mentioned other denominational pastors.

### 4. If it is through attending a convention – what type of convention?

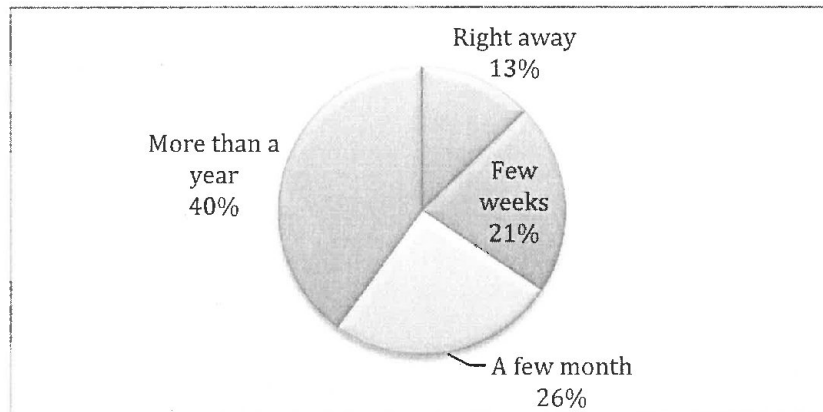
13 % said that they come to know the Lord through conventions conducted by a local church.

### 5. If it is through personal evangelism by a friend – how?

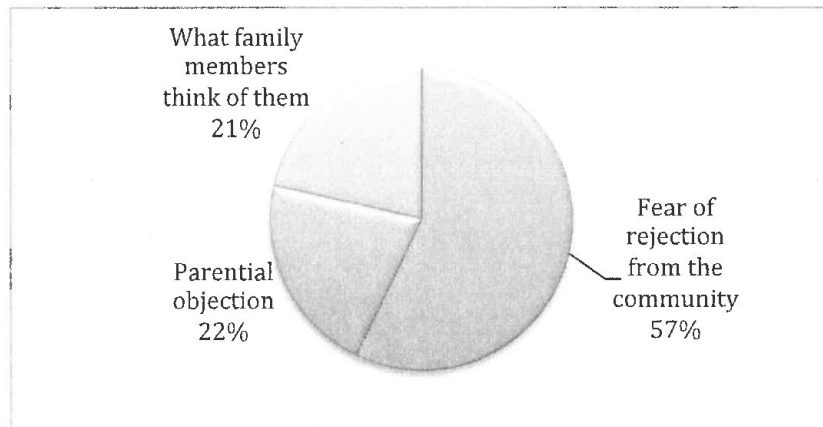
Testimony: 67%

Sharing from Bible: 33%

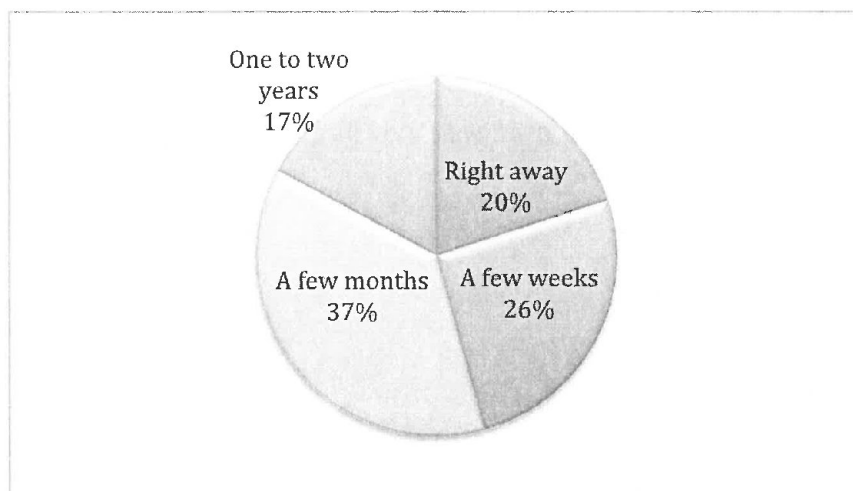
6. After hearing about Christ, how long did you take to make the decision to accept Christ?



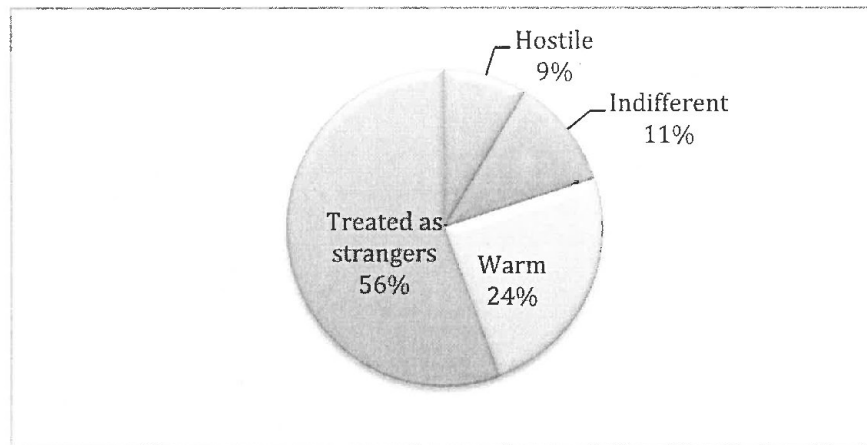
7. If there was a delay in making the decision – what was the reason?



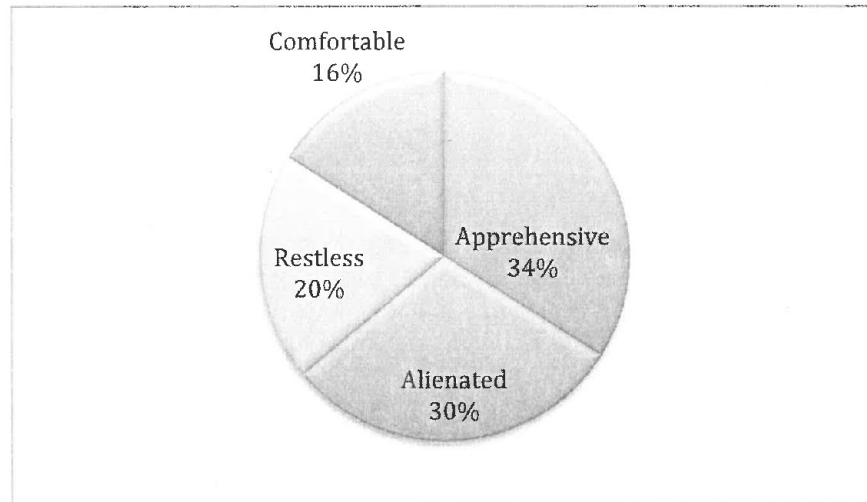
8. After making the decision how long did you take to attend the church?



9. When you went to attend church, what kind of reception did you receive?



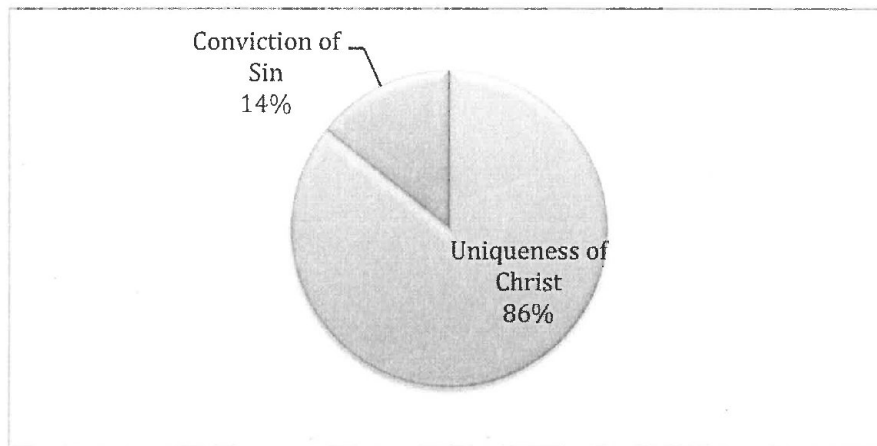
10. During the first service, how did you feel?



11. Describe your first experience in the church:

Most of them felt very uncomfortable. The Christian lingo used, the way service was conducted and everything else was all very new for them.

12. What makes you accept Christ – conviction of sin or attraction towards the uniqueness of Christ?



### III. LIFE IN CHRIST

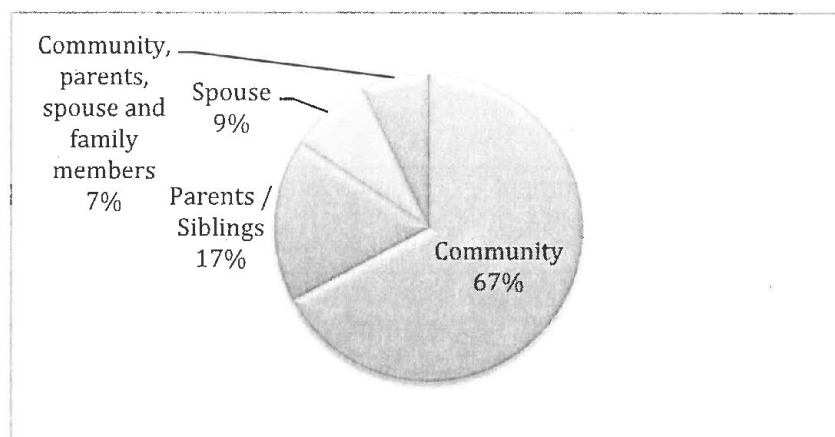
1. For your new faith, did you experience any opposition?

Yes: 84%

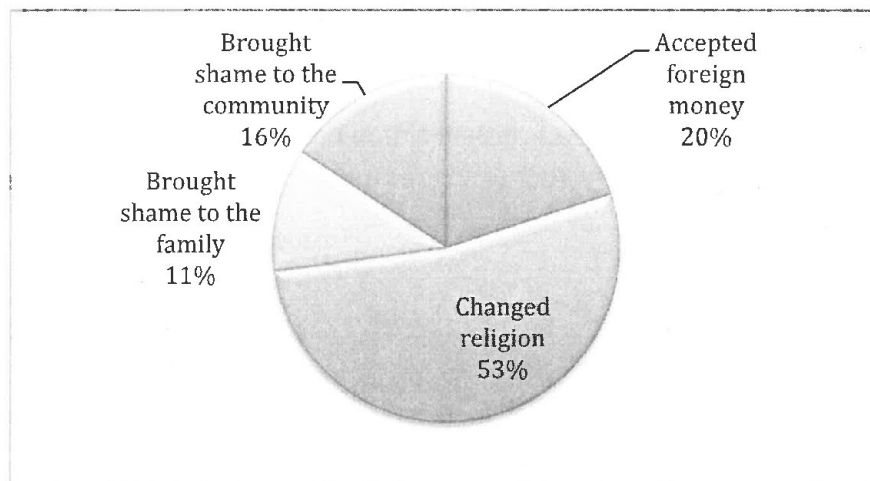
No: 16%

Majority of new believers from Hindu background faces opposition (84%) when they make a commitment to follow Christ.

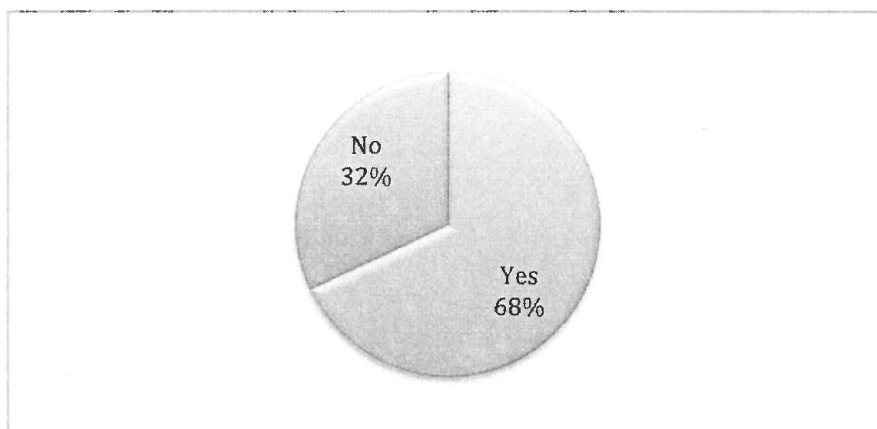
2. If yes, who opposed you?



3. Comments made by family members and friends after you received Christ:



4. Did any church member/s asked you to change the way you dress?



5. A pastor or church member asked you to remove your ornaments and <i>pottu</i> when you went to church.	Yes 70%	No 30%	
6. Who told you to remove your ornaments?	Members 77%	Pastor 23%	
7. When you went to church with your <i>thali</i> (wedding chain), did anyone look at you differently?	Yes 80%	No 13%	Indifferent 7%

8. Did you remove your ornaments (ring or *thali*) after accepting Christ? (ladies only)

Yes: 70%  
No: 30%

9. If yes, what was the reason?

For the sake of unity, not out of biblical conviction.

10. What is your opinion regarding wearing ornaments in the church?

All the men are not much concerned in this matter. Ladies do prefer to wear jewellery in church.

11. Have you gone through baptism?

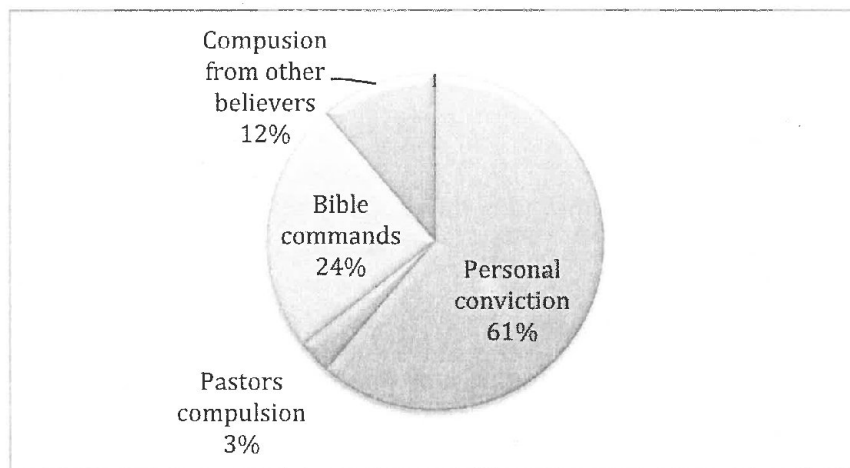
Yes: 89%

No: 11%

12. If yes, how were you baptized?

Immersion: 89%

13. What was the reason for undergoing baptism?



14. After accepting Christ, how long did you wait before you were baptized?

3 to 6 months - 10%

6 to 12 months - 26%

1 to 2 years - 29%

More than 2 years - 24%

15. Where were you baptized?

All were baptized in local churches. This doesn't mean they were baptized in church compound. Some of them are baptized in a river far from local church compound.

#### **IV. GROWTH IN CHRISTIAN LIFE**

1. How did you overcome the problems you faced after accepting Christ?

Most of them responded by saying fellowshiping with other HBB and through prayer.

2. If you were staying with others after you accepted Christ, did you visit your family during this time?

None stayed with others after accepting Christ. All the singles stayed with their family members. Married people had their own families and visited their families as per normal.

3. Did your new life style make any impact on your family? Did they notice anything different in your life?

Yes: 76%

No: 24%

4. Do you know how to share the gospel with others – especially with your own community?

Yes: 89%

No: 11%

5. Have you shared your new experience with your family members?

Yes: 76%

No: 24%

6. If yes, did they accept Christ through your witnessing?

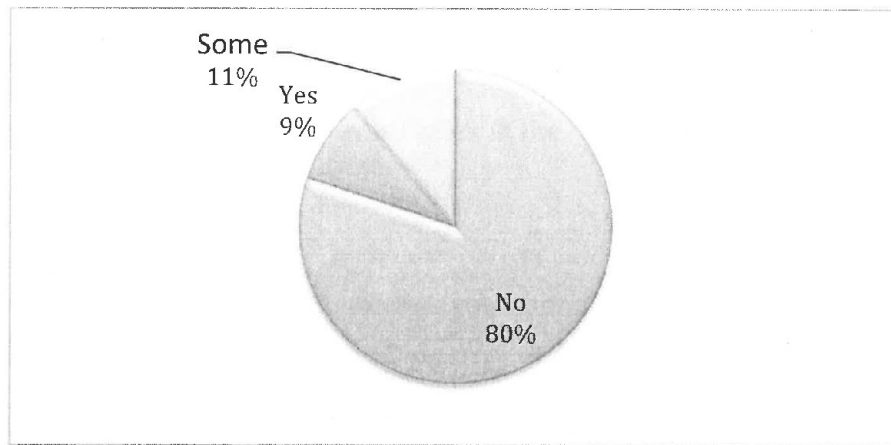
Yes: 38% responded that family members responded to their sharing and accepted Christ.

No: 62%

7. After accepting Christ, did you get any theological training?

All said "No".

8. Have you ever received any type of training?



9. Did you attend any Bible studies other than from your church?

All of them said "No".

10. If yes, where did you go to attend the studies/training?

11. Does your church/pastor give you good Bible teaching?

No: 93%

Yes: 7%

12. Did your pastor encourage you to attend ministry activities other than from your church?

No: 90%

Yes: 10%

13. If you have an opportunity, would you like to attend a week's training on discipleship conducted in your local area?

Yes: 100%

14. Do you share testimony every week in your church?

Yes: 69%

No: 31%

15. Have your pastor informed you of the importance of sharing testimonies?



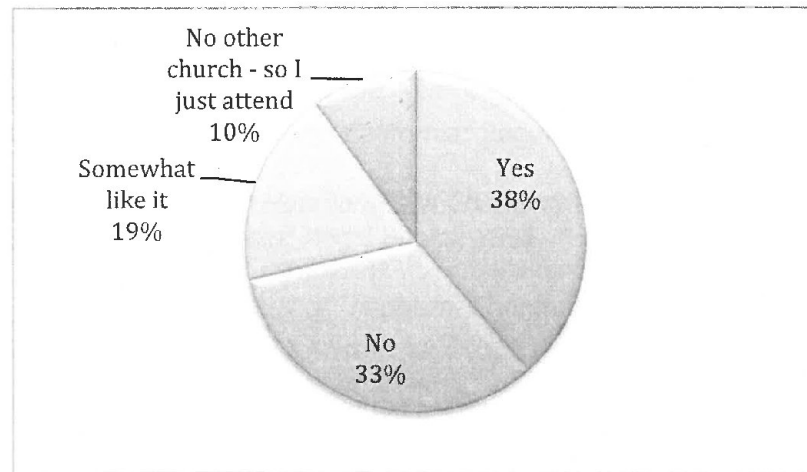
Yes: 63%  
No: 37%

The concept of testimony is sharing for one or two minutes during Sunday morning service, not sharing with Hindus or Muslims.

16. If you did not share testimony every week in the church, did any pastor or church member ask why?

All of them said "Yes".

17. Are you happy with the church services you attend?



18. Do you think that the church you are now attending is suitable for those who are from Hindu background?

No: 74%  
Yes: 26%

19. If yes, why?

Good fellowship and homely.

This survey shows that there is a good fellowship among the church believers and they believe it is important. At the same time it shows they are not concerned about the proper teaching.

20. If no, why not?

Strange style, language is difficult to understand, feel people look down on me.

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## VITA

Ashok Kumar was born on 17 October 1960 in Cannanore, Kerala, India. For the first twenty years of his life, he lived as a practicing Hindu. In the early eighties, however, Christ became a reality in his life.

His missionary work started with Operation Mobilization (OM) India in 1982. He served in different capacities with OM India, onboard the OM ship M.V. Doulos, OM East Asia and Pacific (EAP) and OM Singapore. His missionary life has taken him to over 30 different countries. Over the years, he has been involved in a wide range of evangelistic activities, especially among Hindus. He has led many evangelism teams in north and south India during his years with OM India, and has also conducted training programs for potential leaders. He is currently working with Operation Mobilization, based in Singapore.

He completed his M.Div. in the Asian College of Cultural Studies, Hyderabad, India and Th.M in Trinity Theological College, Singapore. He enrolled in D.Min studies in GCTS in 2007 and is expecting to graduate in May 2011.